

UNODA OCCASIONAL PAPERS

No. 33, OCTOBER 2019

UNITED NATIONS EFFORTS TO REDUCE  
MILITARY EXPENDITURES

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

BY MICHAEL SPIES

**UNODA**

United Nations Office for  
Disarmament Affairs



United Nations

UNODA

United Nations Office for  
Disarmament Affairs

# UNODA OCCASIONAL PAPERS

NO. 33, OCTOBER 2019

---

## UNITED NATIONS EFFORTS TO REDUCE MILITARY EXPENDITURES

### A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

BY MICHAEL SPIES

---



United Nations

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) publishes the UNODA Occasional Papers series to feature, in edited form, papers or statements made at meetings, symposiums, seminars, workshops or lectures that deal with topical issues in the field of arms limitation, disarmament and international security. They are intended primarily for those concerned with these matters in Government, civil society and in the academic community.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations or its Member States. Material in UNODA Occasional Papers may be reprinted without permission, provided the credit line reads “Reprinted from UNODA Occasional Papers” and specifies the number of the Occasional Paper concerned. Notification to the following e-mail address would be highly appreciated: [unoda-web@un.org](mailto:unoda-web@un.org).

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of capital letters combined with figures. These documents are available in the official languages of the United Nations at <http://ods.un.org>. Specific disarmament-related documents can also be accessed through the disarmament reference collection at [www.un.org/disarmament/publications/library](http://www.un.org/disarmament/publications/library).

This publication is available from  
[www.un.org/disarmament](http://www.un.org/disarmament)

UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATION  
Sales No. E.20.IX.1  
ISBN 978-92-1-139175-6  
eISBN 978-92-1-004645-9

Copyright © United Nations, 2019  
All rights reserved  
Printed at the United Nations, New York

# Contents

Abstract . . . . .	iv
Foreword . . . . .	v
Acknowledgements . . . . .	vii
Executive summary . . . . .	viii
List of key General Assembly resolutions . . . . .	xviii
List of key documents . . . . .	xxi
Timeline of efforts within the United Nations to reduce military spending . . . . .	xxiv
I. Early efforts (1945–1965) . . . . .	1
II. Economic and social impacts of disarmament (1960–1973) . . . . .	6
III. Economic and social consequences of the arms race and of military expenditures (1970–1988) . . . . .	14
IV. Reduction of military budgets (1973–1989) . . . . .	25
V. Relationship between disarmament and development (1978–present) . . . . .	49
VI. Disarmament and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development . . . . .	67
VII. Conclusions and recommendations . . . . .	72

## **Abstract**

This publication provides a historical survey of efforts within the United Nations to reduce military spending. Starting with the Charter, which envisages the maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion of resources to arms, reducing military spending was actively pursued throughout the cold war period as a distinct objective within broader negotiations on general and complete disarmament. Separate and distinct efforts to pursue reductions in the military expenditures of the major Powers gave rise to a parallel effort to develop means for sharing information and comparing military spending between States. The resulting mechanism, the United Nations Report on Military Expenditures, continues to function as a means for promoting transparency on military matters. The reduction of military spending was also examined over a period of decades as a means of obtaining resources needed to meet the development objectives of the Organization. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has presented another opportunity for promoting a new common understanding of the relationships between disarmament and development.

## Foreword

The United Nations Charter recognizes the need to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security with the *least diversion of the world's economic and human resources to armaments*. But global military spending is at its highest since the end of the cold war and arms competition remains largely unconstrained.

The singular promotion of military solutions to global problems comes at the expense of national and human security benefits that can be better provided by arms control and cooperation. The negative impact of militarism on inclusive and sustainable development is high. Not only is excessive military spending socially and economically unproductive, but unconstrained military spending also creates distrust, worsens tensions and deteriorates the international security environment. In addition to making our world less safe and secure, the enormous sums spent on today's militaries can't address global contemporary challenges related to poverty, education, inequality, climate change, peace and justice.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for all people and the planet. The international community needs to build on its commitments contained in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. In many ways, the successful implementation of disarmament objectives can support the implementation of these Goals. One of the most direct ways would be to readdress priorities from military overkill to people-centred growth. Reducing military budgets can free up human, financial

and technological resources that could be devoted to the achievement of the Goals.

The Secretary-General, in his Agenda for Disarmament, *Securing Our Common Future*, encourages the international community to rethink unconstrained military spending by fostering greater dialogue and closer cooperation and by building confidence on military matters.

In support of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Agenda for Disarmament, the Office for Disarmament Affairs is promoting renewed research on the relationship between military spending and economic and social development. Accordingly, in two Occasional Papers on military spending, we address the issue from the angles of international peace and security, gender equality, sustainable development and economic conversion.

This first volume provides a historic overview of the efforts within the United Nations to reduce military spending. It examines how the discussions on reducing military budgets have evolved in disarmament forums over the last decades. This includes early efforts to pursue the reduction of military spending throughout the cold-war period as a distinct objective of general and complete disarmament, the emergence of efforts related to promoting transparency on military matters, and the various workstreams carried out under the banner of the relationship between disarmament and development.

I hope the review of these various multilateral initiatives on reducing military spending will contribute to the revival of the issue as a central objective of disarmament and arms control and to the development of new approaches for reducing military expenditures, providing us with concrete options for the promotion of peace, security and development.

**Izumi Nakamitsu**  
Under-Secretary-General and  
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

## Acknowledgements

The author is grateful for the initial research and drafting by Katherine Prizeman. Special thanks to Nora Allgaier for developing and coordinating renewed research within the United Nations on the relationship between military spending and economic and social development, as well as for her feedback and suggestions on the draft. Thanks are also owed to Rene Holbach for his assistance with research. Finally, the author expresses his gratitude to the individuals who reviewed and provided comments on the text, especially Randy Rydell and Daniël Prins as well as staff at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.



## Executive summary

This paper chronicles efforts within the United Nations to reduce military expenditures. As established in Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations, the objective of reducing military expenditures was integral to broader efforts of regulating arms and to the eventual achievement of general and complete disarmament.

Following from ultimately unsuccessful efforts undertaken by the League of Nations, over the past three quarters of a century, a steady succession of different and occasionally overlapping workstreams within the United Nations produced several tangible outcomes, including detailed studies and preparations at the national level on economic and social impacts of the implementation of disarmament agreements; in-depth studies on the economic and social consequences of the arms race and of military expenditures; endorsement of principles for an international agreement on reducing military spending; the establishment of the United Nations Report on Military Expenditures; and a study on the ways and means of reallocating a portion of the funds removed from military use to development assistance, under the umbrella of disarmament and development—although, after the end of the cold war, this umbrella also tended to subsume aspects of prior workstreams.

**Part I** describes the early efforts within the United Nations, beginning with the deliberations undertaken under the auspices of the Security Council, pursuant to its mandate under Article 26, including the work of the Committee for Conventional Armaments and the Disarmament Commission.

From an early date, the Soviet Union sought agreement specifically addressing spending levels, while western countries generally considered that reduced military spending would be a consequence and benefit of advances in other aspects of disarmament. After the Disarmament Commission became deadlocked in the mid-1950s, the Soviet Union first sought to introduce a proposal into the General Assembly, which was rejected by a vote, for a percentage-wise decrease in the military budgets of certain permanent members of the Security Council.

The principles for negotiations on a treaty on general and complete disarmament, agreed upon by the Soviet Union and the United States in 1961, included as a distinct objective the discontinuance of military budgets. The Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament actively negotiated on the draft treaty between 1962 and 1964. On the specific matter of military spending, the two super-Powers ultimately diverged on whether it was feasible at the time to develop specific targets for reducing military budgets at each phase of the disarmament process, as proposed by the Soviet Union, or whether the immediate objective should be to exchange information on military expenditures and to solve the problem of how these were to be objectively measured and verified, as proposed by the United States.

The landmark achievement in 1959 of consensus on the objective of general and complete disarmament prompted new efforts within the United Nations to undertake practical preparations for demobilizing and reintegrating into the civilian economy resources then devoted to military production and use. **Part II** describes these efforts, as undertaken within the Economic and Social Council and under the auspices of the Second Committee. These included the first expert group on a disarmament topic to be established by the Secretary-General pursuant to a mandate of the General Assembly, as well as a 1962 joint declaration co-sponsored by the Soviet Union and the United States and unanimously adopted by the General

Assembly on the conversion to peaceful needs of the resources released by disarmament.

The global studies pursued under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council firmly established an understanding that the economic and social benefits that would be obtained from disarmament would easily outweigh any short-term hardships. It was considered, however, that practical preparations on how to accomplish successful conversion processes would need to be done through studies at the national level. This work stream occurred in parallel with the declaration of the first development decade. Accordingly, it was during this time, when the issue was under active consideration in the Council, that developing countries first proposed, with the backing of the eastern bloc and the non-aligned countries, that a portion of the resources released by disarmament should be specifically devoted to meet the development objectives of the Organization and the needs of developing countries.

By the time that the Economic and Social Council proposed a second global study in the early 1970s, deliberations on general and complete disarmament were only just resuming in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament after a hiatus during the negotiation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The Council came to view the issue, in its various aspects, as belonging to the First Committee, which had since taken up a similar line of inquiry, and it deferred further consideration of this matter after 1973, which coincided with the revival of the Soviet proposal for an agreed cut in the military budgets of the permanent members of the Security Council.

In 1970, the accelerating arms race prompted Secretary-General U Thant to propose that a comprehensive international expert study be undertaken of the economic and social consequences of the arms race and massive military expenditures. Romania took up this proposal and introduced it in the First Committee. **Part III** describes the detailed studies

and analyses produced and periodically updated between 1970 and 1988 on the economic and social consequences of the arms race and of military expenditures. These studies, which effectively succeeded the previous work in the Economic and Social Council, included the first efforts of the United Nations to quantify global military spending, analyse major trends and examine the impact across various economic indicators.

Financial difficulties facing the Organization in the mid-1980s became a hindrance to further periodic updating of these studies and contributed to the loss of consensus on this topic in 1988. The failure of the third special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and the major changes in the international political system at the end of the cold war resulted in this item being set aside when it was due to be reconsidered in 1991. No similar studies have since been authorized, coinciding with the turning away from establishing expert groups to perform work of this nature after the end of the cold war.

**Part IV** describes the efforts to negotiate agreement on the reduction of military budgets, as well as the emergence and culmination of the complementary process leading to the establishment of the standardized instrument on military expenditures. In 1973, the Soviet Union introduced a proposal for a 10-per-cent reduction of the military budgets of the permanent members of the Security Council during the next financial year and the establishment of a fund to assist developing countries. Western countries, led by the United States, objected to the notion of seeking such reductions in the absence of any means of objectively measuring and comparing military across time and spending between countries, especially those with different economic systems. The tension between the call for immediate work towards a political agreement on reductions and the need to first develop a means for measuring and comparing military spending were the primary impediments to both initiatives. These two contending positions were only reconciled at the end of the cold war.

In parallel with the 1973 Soviet proposal and out of concern that the issue would otherwise become deadlocked, Mexico, subsequently backed by Sweden, initiated a process for studying how to objectively measure and compare military budgets. This culminated in 1980 with the developing, testing and establishment of the standardized instrument on military spending and the subsequent expert-level work demonstrating the feasibility of constructing military purchasing-power parities to be used for comparing military spending between countries.<sup>1</sup> The Eastern bloc maintained its objection to these “technical” and “contradictory” studies and declined to provide information to the instrument over the course of the 1980s, and participation in the instrument remained limited to about two dozen Western countries.

Following the initial testing of the standardized instrument, Romania revived efforts to seek political agreement on reductions, which the re-established Disarmament Commission took up between 1979 and 1989. Also, from 1980 to 1989, without achieving any successful outcome, the Conference on Disarmament<sup>2</sup> convened a working group on a comprehensive programme for disarmament, which included sections on the reduction of military budgets at various phases. With respect to the process in the Disarmament Commission, reference to the standardized instrument was a primary sticking point during the final negotiations on the principles considered, ultimately without agreement, in the Commission. After the final round of talks within the Commission concluded without agreement, Romania introduced the last text to the General Assembly for endorsement, without reference to the standardized instrument, where it was adopted by a vote over the objection of western countries.

Ironically, at the same session of the General Assembly, the United Kingdom introduced a resolution on objective

---

<sup>1</sup> The results of the latter studies were never implemented on a regular basis.

<sup>2</sup> Then known as the Committee on Disarmament.

information on military matters, which it co-authored with the Soviet Union. The text reflected developments over the past year, including the new standard of openness, acceptance of the standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures and the role of openness and transparency in enhancing security. It referred the matter to the Disarmament Commission, which in 1992 agreed by consensus on guidelines and recommendations for objective information on military matters.

Since 1993, Germany and Romania have co-led the resolution supporting the standardized instrument on military spending. Despite the end of the cold war, participation in the instrument remained low and serious efforts to broaden participation came only after 1997, after the re-establishment of the Department for Disarmament Affairs. Following consultations pursued by the Secretary-General, which resulted in a number of recommendations, the General Assembly mandated outreach at the international and regional levels, which likely contributed to the large increase in participation over the decade that followed.

The biennial resolutions in the 2000s included also a request for the Secretary-General to make recommendations on necessary changes to the content and structure of the instrument, but there are no signs that any such recommendations were ever developed. In 2007, the sponsors included a request for a group of governmental experts to review the operation and further development of the report; the sponsors specifically noted that the current instrument lacked the means to facilitate comparing and assessing reported data in a user-friendly way and that relevant data was not collected. The group of governmental experts, which met in 2010 and 2011, did not address that purpose but rather focused on updating and simplifying the reporting form. It also recommended changing the name of the instrument to the United Nations Report on Military Expenditures.

Despite the modifications to the reporting form and the new mandates aimed at promoting the use of the instrument, the rate of reoccurring participation declined over the early part of the 2010s and, from 2011 onwards, the Secretariat has not been able to continue its earlier practice of convening regional awareness-raising workshops, amid diminishing returns for this outreach. The General Assembly authorized a subsequent review by an expert group, which convened in 2017. The group did not recommend any further modification of the reporting form, but it did recommend that the Secretariat upgrade the electronic database and re-establish regional outreach, subject to the availability of funds. The General Assembly deferred any decision on establishing a regular review process to the seventy-fourth session.

**Part V** describes the various workstreams carried out under the banner of the relationship between disarmament and development. This began with a proposal by Nordic countries to the preparatory committee for the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament for a study to facilitate political decisions on the redeployment of resources from military use to economic and social development. An important motive for this early work, which has become a point of contention in contemporary discourse, was the understanding that the reallocation of funds released as a consequence of disarmament would not automatically flow to development and therefore there was a need for States to agree on some mechanism for achieving this.

In this connection, the first special session affirmed “a close relationship between disarmament and development” and that “resources released as a result of the implementation of disarmament measures should be devoted to the economic and social development of all nations”. Speaking at the special session, the President of France proposed the establishment of a disarmament fund for development for such a purpose. In accordance with the recommendation of the special session, the Secretary-General established a group of governmental

experts to address the formulation of practical measures for the allocation of resources presently in military use. Under the leadership of France and Sweden, the issue was subsequently run through various disarmament bodies in the early 1980s, including the Committee on Disarmament, the Disarmament Commission and the second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

The watershed moment for the relationship for disarmament and development was the international conference convened in 1987 at the initiative of France. Originally to be held in Paris, the conference eventually had to be held in New York after more time was needed for the preparatory process to reconcile divergent positions. The conference eventually concluded with adoption of a consensus final document which included an action programme. Reactions to the outcome, however, were mixed as some regretted that no mechanisms were established for follow up or implementation. Some Western countries also objected to the notion of an automatic link between disarmament and development. They also opposed any effort to predetermine how development assistance should be allocated. The failure of the third special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament in 1988, to which responsibility for follow up had been referred, resulted in the subsequent abandonment of the topic by its original champions.

Despite the mixed outcome and the lack of effective follow-up in the General Assembly, the 1987 conference resulted in the initiation of many new activities within the Secretariat, including the establishment of a high-level task force. It was active between 1988 and 1991 and it focused on monitoring trends in military spending, facilitating exchanges in experience in conversion from military to civilian production, promoting collective knowledge of non-military threats to international security, and analysing the impact of arms reductions on the world economy and on developing a publicity and information strategy.



The end of the cold war disrupted the continuation of work on disarmament and development. At a political level, the easing of trans-Atlantic tensions and the major changes in the international system paradoxically brought both an expectation for the realization of the so-called peace dividend and the standing down of the disarmament processes needed to achieve it. At the institutional level, the restructuring and streamlining of the Secretariat, including the dissolution of the Department for Disarmament Affairs, curtailed the capacity of the Organization to continue exercising a leading role. While Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali eventually sought guidance from the General Assembly, none ever came.

The re-establishment of the Department in 1997 by Secretary-General Kofi Annan brought about a short-lived revival in the Secretariat's work on the implementation of the outcome of the 1987 conference through the creation of the high-level steering group on disarmament and development. The steering group pursued programmes and activities, including the development of statistical information and analytical material on military expenditures, the arms trade and conversion as well as the organization of regular symposiums, panels and workshops. Its most significant activity was a symposium held at United Nations Headquarters in July 1999, which was chaired by Lawrence R. Klein, a Nobel laureate in economics.

However, by 2002, financial constraints began to restrict the scope of activities that could be undertaken by the Secretariat and very few States had responded to the repeated requests to communicate their views and proposals. Therefore, the Secretary-General proposed the establishment of a group of governmental experts to undertake a reappraisal of the relationship between disarmament and development in the current international context, as well as the future role of the Organization in this connection. The group's recommendations supported, *inter alia*, greater adherence to the United Nations transparency instruments; further strengthening of the high-level steering group; greater integration of disarmament,

humanitarian and development activities within the United Nations; and a greater focus on combating the illicit arms trade.

The high-level steering group welcomed the report. Subsequent reports of the Secretary-General emphasized that further activities would depend on the availability of resources and access to extrabudgetary support. These reports included information on the activities of partnering entities through 2007. References to the steering group ceased from 2008 onwards and since then the reports of the Secretary-General have provided more general information on activities of the Office for Disarmament Affairs in the field of conventional arms.

While the Millennium Declaration, adopted in September 2000, included a section on peace, security and disarmament, the Millennium Development Goals focused narrowly on development and the eradication of extreme poverty. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015, has provided a more inclusive platform for pursuing interconnections between disarmament and development although it only refers directly to arms control in connection with 16.4 on reducing illicit financial and arms flows. On 24 May 2018, the Secretary-General launched his Agenda for Disarmament, which sought, *inter alia*, to operationally link the implementation of disarmament objectives with many other Sustainable Development Goals, in order to bring the historical relationship between disarmament and development back to the forefront of international consciousness.

For a visual representation of historical efforts within the United Nations to reduce military spending, see the timeline on page xxiv.

## List of key General Assembly resolutions

<i>No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Title (significance)</i>	<i>Lead sponsor</i>
380 (V)	1950	<b>Peace through deeds</b> (First resolution to link disarmament and development)	United Kingdom
1378 (XIV)	1959	<b>General and complete disarmament</b> (First resolution co-sponsored by all Member States)	Soviet Union
1516 (XV)	1960	<b>Economic and social consequences of disarmament</b> (First resolution dedicated to reducing military spending; established the first disarmament expert group)	Pakistan
1837 (XVII)	1962	<b>Declaration on the conversion to peaceful needs of the resources released by disarmament</b> (Endorsed the first study on the economic and social consequences of disarmament)	Soviet Union and United States
2667 (XXV)	1970	<b>Economic and social consequences of the armaments race and its extremely harmful effects on world peace and security</b> (First resolution dedicated to reducing military spending in the First Committee; based on a proposal by Secretary-General U Thant)	Romania
3093 (XXVIII) A	1973	<b>Reduction of the military budgets of States permanent members of the Security Council by 10 per cent and utilization of part of the funds thus saved to provide assistance to developing countries</b> (First resolution to seek a dedicated agreement on reducing military spending)	Soviet Union

<i>No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Title (significance)</i>	<i>Lead sponsor</i>
3093 (XXVIII) B	1973	<b>Reduction of the military budgets of States permanent members of the Security Council by 10 per cent and utilization of part of the funds thus saved to provide assistance to developing countries</b> (Initiated the process leading to developing the United Nations Report on Military Expenditures)	Mexico
34/83 F	1979	<b>Freezing and reduction of military budgets</b> (First consensus resolution in the First Committee on reducing military budgets; served as a basis for the effort from 1979–1989 in the Disarmament Commission to elaborate principles for an agreement to reduce military budgets)	Romania
35/142 B	1980	<b>Reduction of military budgets</b> (Adopted the system for standardized reporting of military expenditures)	Sweden
36/92 G	1981	<b>Study on the relationship between disarmament and development</b> (First resolution dedicated to the relationship between disarmament and development; endorsed the study recommended by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament)	Sweden
39/160	1984	<b>Relationship between disarmament and development</b> (Decided to convene an international conference on this matter, which was eventually held in New York in 1987)	France
42/45	1987	<b>Relationship between disarmament and development</b> (Requested the Secretary-General to implement the action programme of the 1987 conference)	India

<i>No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Title (significance)</i>	<i>Lead sponsor</i>
44/114 A	1989	<b>Reduction of military budgets</b> (Annexed and brought to the attention of Member States the draft principles discussed in the Disarmament Commission since 1979)	Romania
44/116 E	1989	<b>Objective information on military matters</b> (Co-authored with the Soviet Union; first consensus on the instrument for standardized reporting on military expenditures)	United Kingdom

## List of key documents

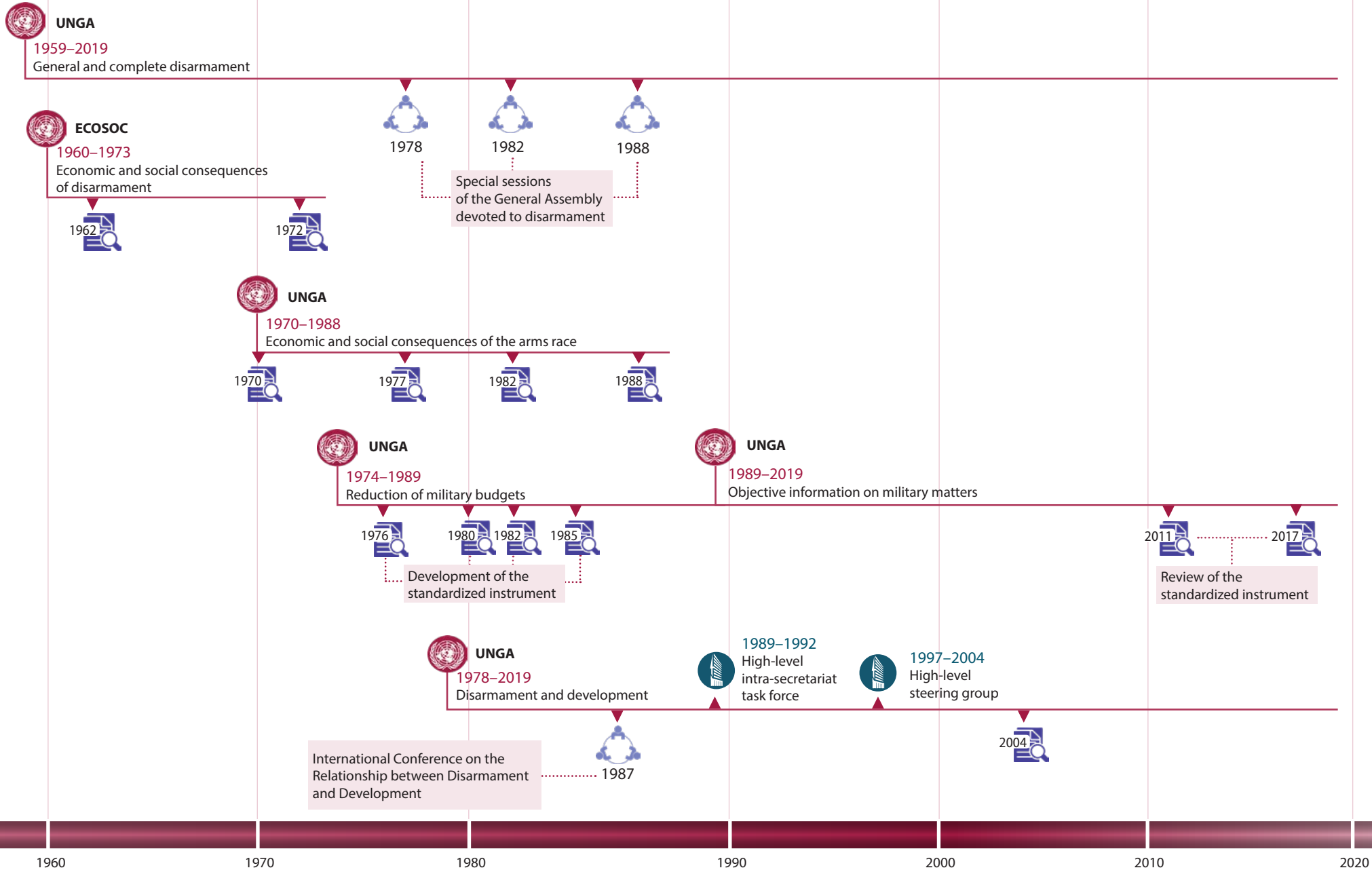
<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Title (significance)</i>
<a href="#">A/4879</a>	1961	<b>Joint Statement of Agreed Principles for Disarmament Negotiations</b> (McCloy-Zorin Accords, containing an outline of a treaty on general and complete disarmament)
<a href="#">E/3593/Rev.1</a>	1962	<b>Economic and social consequences of disarmament</b> (First study prepared by a disarmament expert group)
<a href="#">A/8469/Rev.1</a>	1971	<b>Economic and social consequences of the armaments race and its extremely harmful effects on world peace and security</b> (First study on this topic to be mandated through the First Committee)
<a href="#">ST/ECA/174</a>	1972	<b>Economic and social consequences of disarmament</b> (Second study on this topic; first disarmament expert group chaired by a woman)
<a href="#">A/9770/Rev.1</a>	1974	<b>Reduction of the military budgets of States permanent members of the Security Council by 10 per cent and utilization of part of the funds thus saved to provide assistance to developing countries</b> (Report of the group of consultant experts established pursuant to resolution <a href="#">3093 (XXVIII) B</a> )
<a href="#">A/31/222/Rev.1</a>	1977	<b>Measurement and international reporting of military expenditures</b> (Initial development of the standardized instrument for reporting military spending)
<a href="#">A/32/88/Rev.1</a>	1977	<b>Economic and social consequences of the arms race and of military expenditure</b> (Second study mandated through the First Committee)
<a href="#">A/32/194</a>	1977	<b>Reduction of military budgets</b> (Analysis of comments by States on the proposed standardized instrument for reporting military spending)

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Title (significance)</i>
<a href="#">A/RES/S-10/2</a>	1978	<b>Final document of the tenth special session of the General Assembly</b> (Outcome of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament)
<a href="#">A/35/479</a>	1980	<b>Reduction of military budgets</b> (Practical test of the proposed standardized instrument for reporting military spending)
<a href="#">A/36/356</a>	1981	<b>Study on the relationship between disarmament and development</b> (Mandated by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament)
<a href="#">A/37/386</a>	1982	<b>Economic and social consequences of the arms race and of military expenditure</b> (Third study mandated through the First Committee)
<a href="#">A/40/421</a>	1985	<b>Construction of military price indexes and purchasing-power parities for comparison of military expenditures</b> (Study to further develop methods for the international comparison of military budgets)
United Nations publication, Sales No. <a href="#">E.86.IX.5</a>	1986	<b>Joint Declaration by the Panel of Eminent Persons in the Field of Disarmament and Development</b> (Panel convened in the context of the preparatory process for the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, which was convened in 1987)
<a href="#">A/CONF.130/39</a>	1987	<b>Final document of the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development</b>
<a href="#">A/43/368</a>	1988	<b>Economic and social consequences of the arms race and of military expenditure</b> (Fourth study mandated through the First Committee)
<a href="#">A/47/42</a>	1992	<b>Guidelines and recommendations for objective information on military matters</b> (Agreed by the Disarmament Commission)

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Title (significance)</i>
<a href="#">A/59/119</a>	2004	<b>The relationship between disarmament and development in the current international context</b> (Mandated to make recommendations on reappraising the issue and on the future role of the Organization)
<a href="#">A/66/89</a>	2011	<b>Report of the group of governmental experts on the operation and further development of the United Nations standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures</b> (First review of the standardized instrument for reporting military spending)
<a href="#">A/72/293</a>	2017	<b>Report of the group of governmental experts on the operation and further development of the United Nations standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures</b> (Second review of the standardized instrument for reporting military spending)



# Timeline of efforts within the United Nations to reduce military spending



## Early efforts (1945–1965)

Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations establishes a connection between disarmament and economic well-being. It gives the Security Council responsibility for formulating plans for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments “in order to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources”.

An antecedent of Article 26 can be found in the Covenant of the League of Nations. Article 8 of the Covenant constituted both a prototype for Article 8 of the Charter and a preview for future work on disarmament and development that would be pursued within the United Nations.<sup>1</sup> One of the most notable outputs of the League in this connection was its

---

<sup>1</sup> By its Article 8, “The Members of the League recognise that the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations. ... The Members of the League agree that the manufacture by private enterprise of munitions and implements of war is open to grave objections. The Council shall advise how the evil effects attendant upon such manufacture can be prevented, due regard being had to the necessities of those Members of the League which are not able to manufacture the munitions and implements of war necessary for their safety. The Members of the League undertake to interchange full and frank information as to the scale of their armaments, their military, naval and air programmes and the condition of such of their industries as are adaptable to war-like purposes.”

publication of an annual armament yearbook. As stated in the introduction to a booklet compiled by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs in 2007:

In July 1923, following the recommendation of the Temporary Mixed Commission, the Council of the League authorized the Secretariat to begin publishing a yearbook containing statistical information on the military forces, defence budgets and the economic potential for war of its member States, drawn from official and public documents. In 1924, the Secretariat of the League published its first yearbook in the form of a series of monographs devoted to each State. ... The differences in the reporting methods of States are reflected in the Yearbook, as the Secretariat of the League did not attempt to recast the defence budgets according to a standardized system in order to make them comparable.<sup>2</sup>

Within the newly formed United Nations, the early efforts by the Security Council for disarmament deadlocked after December 1949.<sup>3</sup> Resolution 380 (V), entitled “Peace through deeds”, represented the first attempt by the General Assembly to link disarmament and development. Operative paragraph 2 (d) of that resolution states “that every nation agree: ... to reduce to a minimum the diversion for armament of its human and economic resources and to strive towards the development of such resources for the general welfare, with due regard to

---

<sup>2</sup> Nazir Kamal, introduction to the [booklet](#) compiled by the Conventional Arms Branch of the Office for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations contains statistical information derived from Part II of the 1931 Armaments Yearbook of the League of Nations.

<sup>3</sup> By resolution [S/RES/18](#) of 13 February 1947, the Security Council established the Committee for Conventional Armaments, as a complement to the Atomic Energy Commission established by the General Assembly in resolution [1 \(I\)](#) of 24 January 1946, in order to consider proposals for the general regulation and reduction of armaments and armed forces.

the needs of the under-developed areas of the world”.<sup>4</sup> The Assembly adopted the resolution on 17 November 1950 by a non-recorded vote of 50 to 5, with 1 abstention.<sup>5</sup>

*Early negotiations in the Disarmament Commission, 1952–1957*

In 1952, by resolution 502 (VI) the General Assembly established the Disarmament Commission as a subsidiary organ of the Security Council with a mandate to prepare proposals for a draft treaty (or treaties) for the regulation, limitation and balanced reduction of all armed forces and armaments, for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and for the control of atomic energy.<sup>6</sup> While the Disarmament Commission discussed the reduction of military budgets, there were divergent views between the Western States—which considered that such reductions should be considered as part of a comprehensive agreement or programme—and the Soviet Union—which sought such reductions as a stand-alone objective.

For example, in 1954, the United Kingdom proposed that freezing military expenditures could be among the first steps of a broader disarmament programme and that such a “standstill”

---

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph was included to accommodate the substance of amendments proposed by India to the draft resolution (see [A/C.1/SR.383](#)).

<sup>5</sup> The Soviet Union and its allies opposed the resolution, which was introduced by the Netherlands on behalf of seven States as an alternative to a Soviet draft text under the item “Declaration on the removal of the threat of a new war and the strengthening of peace and security among the nations”. The divergences on the resolutions centred on disagreements over the Korean War (Western countries sceptically viewed the Soviet appeal for non-aggression in light of its support for North Korea) and over the approach towards the control of atomic energy (the Soviet Union insisted on immediate action leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons). See [A/C.1/SR.374–383](#).

<sup>6</sup> The Disarmament Commission merged the mandates and functions of the Atomic Energy Commission and the Commission for Conventional Armaments, both of which were abolished pursuant to resolution 502 (VI).

agreement could serve as an effective safeguarding tool.<sup>7</sup> After the Disarmament Commission became deadlocked following its session in 1957, the Soviet Union sought to introduce, initially unsuccessfully, a proposal for a direct reduction in military spending by major Powers. Towards this end, it submitted a draft resolution in 1958 recommending that France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States reduce their military budgets by 10 to 15 per cent and that part of the savings be allocated to a fund for assistance to developing countries. The General Assembly rejected the draft resolution by a vote of 39 to 10 with 32 abstentions.<sup>8</sup>

*Negotiations on general and complete disarmament, 1959–1964*

A major turning point for consideration within the United Nations came after 1959 and the pursuit of negotiations between 1962 and 1964 on a treaty on general and complete disarmament within the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament. The catalyst was the adoption of resolution [1378 \(XIV\)](#), which established general and complete disarmament as one of the highest priorities of the United Nations. It was the first resolution to be co-sponsored by the entire membership of the General Assembly.

In 1961, the Soviet Union and the United States agreed on a set of principles to guide negotiations on the treaty, also known as the McCloy-Zorin Accords.<sup>9</sup> The principles

---

<sup>7</sup> *Official Records of the Disarmament Commission, Supplement for January to December 1956* (document DC/83), annex 5 (DC/SC.1/41 and Corr.1), 1070th meeting.

<sup>8</sup> *Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-second Session*, annexes, agenda item 29 ([A/7017](#)).

<sup>9</sup> Letter dated 20 September 1961 from the Permanent Representatives of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly, transmitted the “Joint Statement of Agreed Principles for Disarmament Negotiations” ([A/4879](#)). The common name refers to its

provided for the elaboration of a programme for general and complete disarmament, which would contain provisions “with respect to the military establishment of every nation, for ... [d]iscontinuance of military expenditures”.

The draft treaty introduced by the Soviet Union contained such an obligation, requiring it to be carried out over a period of four years.<sup>10</sup> The draft treaty specified that the funds released from the various stages disarmament measures should be used for peaceful purposes and that a portion should be diverted for economic and technical assistance to underdeveloped countries.<sup>11</sup> These provisions would be subject to verification by international financial inspectors.

The outline of basic provisions of the draft treaty submitted by the United States repeated the objective of discontinuing military expenditures pursuant to a programme for general and complete disarmament. Its specific provisions on military expenditures would have required the parties to submit an itemized report on their military spending at the end of each stage of the disarmament process. However, it left the issue of arrangements for the verifiable reduction of military expenditures to future examination by the parties.<sup>12</sup>

---

principal negotiations, John McCloy, an advisor to President John F. Kennedy, and Valerian Zorin, Permanent Representative of the Soviet Union to the United Nations.

<sup>10</sup> “Draft treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict international control”, submitted by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, *Official Records of the Disarmament Commission, Supplement for January 1961 to December 1962*, p. 115 (ENDC/2, 19 March 1962). See also ENDC/2/Add.1.

<sup>11</sup> See Articles 13, 26 and 35.

<sup>12</sup> See “Outline of basic provisions of a treaty on general and complete disarmament in a peaceful world”, submitted by the United States of America, *Official Records of the Disarmament Commission, Supplement for January 1961 to December 1962*, p. 140 (ENDC/30 and Corr.1, 18 April 1962).

## Economic and social impacts of disarmament (1960–1973)

### *First group of experts, 1960–1962*

The breakthrough on general and complete disarmament within the General Assembly in 1959 first sparked interest within the Economic and Social Council on the practical work that would need to be undertaken to prepare States for a significant reduction in global military spending. The adoption of resolution [1378 \(XIV\)](#) gave rise to an expectation that progress towards general disarmament was imminent, leading to concerns over the economic impact of disarmament and the need to understand the potential challenges associated with the conversion of production infrastructure and workforces.<sup>1</sup>

The focus of this early work on military expenditures, pursued through the Economic and Social Council and the Second Committee of the General Assembly from 1960 to 1973, established some basic principles and understandings that continue to underpin discussions on military expenditures. First, it established the connection between disarmament and development, as an analytical concept, as an aspirational objective and as a programmatic undertaking of the Organization. Second, it treated military expenditure as a distinct matter in the area of disarmament, which could be

---

<sup>1</sup> For a general overview, see also *The United Nations and Disarmament, 1945–1970*, chap. 5, pp. 126–133.

addressed apart from the process of reducing arms and armed forces and not merely to be realized as a consequence of agreed reductions.

While the work pursued under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council acknowledged and substantially engaged with the problems posed by excessive military spending and the arms race, work specifically devoted to those aspects would only be taken up starting in the 1970s within the First Committee (see Part III below on the economic and social consequences of the arms race).

The topic of the first expert group on a disarmament matter to be mandated by the General Assembly addressed the economic and social consequences of disarmament, mandated by a draft resolution<sup>2</sup> introduced by Pakistan to the Second Committee. In the first preambular paragraph of that resolution, the Assembly recalled resolution 1378 (XIV). The proposal for the study was animated by concern that, in light of recent progress in negotiations on general and complete disarmament,<sup>3</sup> States would need to prepare for problems that could arise from the reduction of military expenditures, including how to utilize the resources made available from disarmament and how developing countries might cope from a decline in demand for raw resources.

The group, which completed its work in 1962, concluded that “All the problems and difficulties of transition connected with disarmament could be met by appropriate national and international measures. There should thus be no doubt that the diversion to peaceful purposes of the resources now in military

---

<sup>2</sup> A/C.2/L.469, adopted by the General Assembly as resolution 1516 (XV) on 15 December 1960.

<sup>3</sup> In the resolution, the General Assembly cites resolution 1378 (XIV) on the general and complete disarmament, the first resolution adopted by the General Assembly to be co-sponsored by the entire membership of the United Nations. The Ten-Nation Committee on Disarmament pursued negotiations on the matter in 1960.



use could be accomplished to the benefit of all countries and lead to the improvement of world economic and social conditions. The achievement of general and complete disarmament would be an unqualified blessing to all mankind.”<sup>4</sup>

*Further consideration by the Economic and Social Council, 1962–1965*

On the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council through the Second Committee, in 1962 the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution 1837 (XVII), entitled “Declaration on the conversion to peaceful needs of the resources released by disarmament”, on the basis of a draft jointly submitted by the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>5</sup> In the resolution, the Assembly endorsed the conclusion of the consultative group<sup>6</sup> and referred the report to the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee. It also expressed support for further studies and requested the Economic and Social Council to consider all pertinent aspects of the matter, including the possibility of establishing an ad hoc group to accelerate studies in this field.

The conclusion of the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water in 1963 gave a further boost to the spirit of optimism that

---

<sup>4</sup> E/3593/Rev.1.

<sup>5</sup> A/C.2/L.702/Rev.1: The joint draft replaced two previously contending drafts, one backed by the Soviet Union (A/C.2/L.646) and the other backed by eight countries, including the United States (A/C.2/L.647). See “Report of the Second Committee, Economic Programme for Disarmament” (A/5361). According to the summary records of the meeting, in introducing the joint resolution the United States observed that “It had long before been generally acknowledged that there were no economic reasons for large defence expenditures, that disarmament would be of great benefit to peoples everywhere, and that no economy, whether based on free enterprise or centrally planned, had anything to fear from effectively controlled disarmament” (A/C.2/SR.862, para. 6).

<sup>6</sup> Specifically, that “the achievement of general and complete disarmament would be an unqualified blessing to all mankind”.

surrounded discussion of this matter in the Second Committee. The General Assembly adopted without a vote a further follow-up resolution (1931 (XVIII), entitled “Conversion to peaceful needs of the resources released by disarmament”),<sup>7</sup> introduced jointly by the Soviet Union and the United States. In introducing the resolution, the United States argued that the text was the logical way to promote useful studies in that area. The final text incorporated elements of a competing draft resolution introduced by Nigeria, which joined as a main sponsor, after agreeing to defer the matter of requesting the Secretary-General to carry out another study.<sup>8</sup>

The Secretary-General subsequently established the Inter-Agency Committee on the Conversion to Peaceful Needs of the Resources Released by Disarmament. It was created further to the invitation in resolution 1931 (XVIII) for the specialized agencies concerned, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the regional economic commissions to cooperate in advancing studies concerning international and economic trade relations relevant to the economic and social aspects of disarmament, as well as studies of the problems that might arise in relation to primary commodities.<sup>9</sup>

Starting from the twenty-fourth session, in 1964, States and the Secretary-General began to question the utility of any further global study on the economic consequences of disarmament and they considered that national studies would

---

<sup>7</sup> The title reverted the one preferred by the United States in 1962, dropping the term “declaration”. See *A/C.2/SR.862*, para. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *A/C.2/SR.850*, para. 1. Operative paragraph 5 of the adopted text reads: “Requests the Economic and Social Council at its thirty-seventh session to consider all pertinent aspects of the question of conversion of resources released by general disarmament to peaceful uses, including, inter alia, the possibility of the establishment of an ad hoc group, having due regard to equitable geographic distribution, for the purpose of accelerating activities in this field of study, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its nineteenth session.”

<sup>9</sup> *Report of the Economic and Social Committee (A/5803)*.

be more useful. Subsequent resolutions reflected this shift of approach.

*Increasing link between disarmament and development,  
1965–1970*

Negotiations on general and complete disarmament in the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee had stagnated significantly by 1964 and, from 1965 onwards, that body devoted its attention to the negotiation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The difficulties in the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee in its negotiations on general disarmament negotiations seemed to negatively impact the mood within the Second Committee,<sup>10</sup> in contrast to the sense of optimism evident in their previous discussions.

At the same time, it marked a shift from leadership by the major Powers on the topic to leadership by developing countries, unified around a basic demand that resources that would be released as a result of disarmament *should be* devoted to assisting the development objectives of the United Nations. Nigeria took the lead on the item in 1965 and it limited co-sponsorship to developing countries. The United States subsequently withdrew its sponsorship to respect the wishes of the lead authors.<sup>11</sup> In resolution [2092 \(XX\)](#), adopted by a non-recorded vote of 101 to 1, the General Assembly expressed hope that Governments would make a serious effort to develop national studies of the economic and social aspects of disarmament and transmit them to the Secretary-General.

The following year, in 1966, no delegation spoke on the matter in the Second Committee nor introduced any substantive resolution. The General Assembly ultimately endorsed the

---

<sup>10</sup> Contrasting with their previous public show of unity, the Soviet Union and the United States exchanged statements in right of reply, focusing on the situation in Viet Nam and disagreements encountered in negotiations on general and complete disarmament. See [A/C.2/SR.1010](#).

<sup>11</sup> [A/C.2/SR.1009](#).

resolution of the Economic and Social Council and decided that reports concerning the economic and social consequences of disarmament should in the future be submitted to the Council on a biennial basis, unless developments warrant additional reports.<sup>12</sup> In 1968, the Assembly adopted resolution [2387 \(XXIII\)](#) in which it invited Member States to submit national studies, as referred to in previous resolutions.

The conclusion of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1968 brought expectations that the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee would return its attention to the negotiation of a treaty on general and complete disarmament, in which a reduction of military budgets would be part. In 1969, in its resolution [2602 \(XXIV\)](#) on general and complete disarmament, introduced by Ireland, Italy and Japan, the General Assembly recommended that “consideration be given to channelling a substantial part of the resources freed by measures in the field of disarmament to promote the economic development of developing countries and, in particular, their scientific and technological progress”. By that resolution, the Assembly also notably declared the 1970s as a Disarmament Decade, further to the call by Secretary-General U Thant, and called for all States to intensify efforts for effective measures related to the cessation of the arms race and to nuclear disarmament and the elimination of other weapons of mass destruction, and for a treaty on general and complete disarmament.

The topic discussed by the Economic and Social Council was subsequently overtaken by the closely related item first introduced to the First Committee by Romania, further to a proposal by Secretary-General U Thant, in resolution [2667 \(XXV\)](#) on the economic and social consequences of the arms race (see section below).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> General Assembly resolution [2171 \(XXI\)](#).

<sup>13</sup> At its twenty-eighth session, the First Committee did not directly take up the report submitted to the Economic and Social Council, although

In the Second Committee, the Philippines introduced the item at the twenty-fifth session in 1970, resulting in the adoption of resolution [2685 \(XXV\)](#). Acceptance of considering the item further appeared to be negatively influenced by the prevailing deadlock on general and complete disarmament and by the fact that the First Committee had since taken up a similar item (see Part III below on the economic and social consequences of the arms race). In submitting a substantive draft in the Second Committee, it expressed a desire to link the Disarmament Decade with the Second Development Decade. Eastern European States opposed and voted against the resolution, arguing that the matter belonged to the First Committee.<sup>14</sup> A number of Western States abstained. They also expressed scepticism over the suggested role for the Secretary-General to formulate proposals to guide Member States on the link between disarmament and development.<sup>15</sup>

*Second group of experts and shift to the First Committee, 1972–1973*

In resolution [2685 \(XXV\)](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at its twenty-eighth session (1973). In accordance with that resolution, the Secretary-General appointed a group of experts, which met in 1972 and was chaired by the Minister of State of Sweden, Alva Myrdal. In accordance with the terms set out by the General Assembly, the report of the group primarily focused on elaborating the relationship between disarmament and development, as well as on the mobilization of public opinion behind this objective.<sup>16</sup> The Economic and Social Council discussed the report in 1973. Delegations, including the Soviet Union and the United States, considered the report to be

---

some delegations did refer to it in their general statements. See [A/C.1/PV.1953](#), paras. 62–63, 77.

<sup>14</sup> [A/C.2/SR.1343](#).

<sup>15</sup> [A/C.2/SR.1345](#).

<sup>16</sup> [ST/ECA/174](#).

good. They ultimately left it for the General Assembly to decide on how to take it forward.<sup>17</sup> The Assembly adopted with a vote a decision to take note of the report but did not include the item on the agenda for any subsequent session of the General Assembly.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> E/AC.6/SR.611.

<sup>18</sup> [A/9400](#).

## **Economic and social consequences of the arms race and of military expenditures (1970–1988)**

Between 1970 and 1988, the United Nations produced and periodically updated a detailed study and analysis on the economic and social consequences of the arms race and of military expenditures. Romania was the lead sponsor of the resolutions on this item in the First Committee. The studies built upon and effectively took over the work initiated within the Economic and Social Committee on the economic and social consequences of disarmament, which had been initiated in 1960 via resolution [1516 \(XV\)](#).

The studies initiated and updated through the First Committee also ran in parallel to the related effort to seek a reduction in the military budgets of the permanent members of the Security Council. That effort led ultimately to the development of a standardized instrument on military expenditures and the endorsement of principles for an international agreement on the reduction of military budgets. While the reports addressed the phenomenon of military spending in all its aspects, with subsequent updates expanding to cover global research, production and arms transfers, a primary focus of the series remained on qualifying and quantifying the cold war arms race. During the 1980s, Western military Powers grew increasingly sceptical of the value of updating the studies, in comparison to the cost of their production. The fact that the

end of the cold war coincided with the time frame in which the General Assembly was to further examine this item undoubtedly contributed a large part to the cessation of these studies.

*Proposal by U Thant and the first study, 1970–1971*

In his introduction to the annual report on the work of the Organization in 1970, Secretary-General U Thant proposed that a comprehensive international expert study be undertaken of the economic and social consequences of the arms race and massive military expenditures, “in order that the Governments and peoples of the world may be more fully informed and may better understand the issues and problems related to the continuing arms race”.<sup>1</sup> He further suggested that the study could complement the 1962 study on the economic and social consequences of disarmament and “could delineate the implications and evaluate the effects on nations and on economies of the growing stockpiles of armaments and the increasing volume of resources being diverted from peaceful to military purposes”.

Romania took up the proposal of the Secretary-General and requested the addition of a new item entitled “Economic and social consequences of the armaments race and its extremely harmful effects on world peace and security” to the agenda of the twenty-fifth session.<sup>2</sup> In its memorandum introducing the item, Romania cited the rapidly escalating increase in global military expenditures and the heavy burden that placed on all peoples, in light of the diversion of material wealth, scientists and technicians to non-productive purposes. Under this item, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution [2667 \(XXV\)](#) in which it, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General to prepare, with the assistance of qualified consultant

---

<sup>1</sup> [A/8001/Add.1](#), para. 29; The Secretary-General first made the proposal in an address titled “The Politics of Disarmament: Proposals for the 1970s”, delivered on 22 May 1970, SG/SM/1261.

<sup>2</sup> [A/7994](#).



experts appointed by him, a report on the economic and social consequences of the arms race and of military expenditure.

Pursuant to this mandate, the Secretary-General appointed a group of 14 consultant experts, mostly professors of economics drawn from a diverse set of countries. The group was chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Security Council Affairs and submitted its study in October 1971.<sup>3</sup> It addressed the qualitative aspects of the arms race, the arms race in terms of resources, the dynamics of military research and development and the national and international consequences of the arms race and military expenditures.

The report noted that since the end of the Second World War, the burden of world military expenditures amounted to between 6 and 6.5 per cent of the total world gross national product. As emphasized by the Secretary-General in his foreword, the devotion of such large expenditures to military use in the absence of major war was a departure from historical experience. The group also noted the post-war trend of spikes of military spending during times of crises (e.g., the 1950–1953 Korean War) failing to return to pre-crisis levels. During the 1960s, only six countries<sup>4</sup> were responsible for four-fifths of global military expenditures, compared to 6 per cent for all developing countries combined.

The group also considered the opportunity costs of high levels of military spending, in terms of, inter alia, diminished private consumption resulting from higher taxation and borrowing, reduced spending on public goods and services and destabilized local job markets resulting from the vagaries in demand for military production. With respect to the “benefits” realized from the spin-off from military research and development to the civilian economy, they considered the consequences of major war not to be worth the cost and they

---

<sup>3</sup> A/8469/Rev.1.

<sup>4</sup> China, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and United States.

noted that such research and development was not designed to solve the world's social and economic problems.

The group unanimously concluded that a substantial reduction in global military expenditures should be brought about as soon as possible, that all countries had a responsibility of taking steps towards that goal, and that halting the arms race and significantly reducing military expenditures would increase the possibility of providing additional aid to developing countries. They called for the Secretary-General to keep the facts under periodic review.

In 1971, the twenty-sixth session of the General Assembly adopted, by a non-recorded vote of 111 to 1, with 3 abstentions, resolution 2831 (XXVI) in which it welcomed with satisfaction the report of the group and expressed the hope that it would help to focus future negotiations on nuclear disarmament and on the goal of general and complete disarmament. The Assembly also recommended that the conclusions of the report should be taken into account in future disarmament negotiations, that it be widely distributed by Governments and that it be taken into account in future action by the United Nations in the field of disarmament. It decided to keep the item under constant review and to place on the agenda of the twenty-eighth session.

### *Second study, 1973–1977*

In 1973, when the General Assembly resumed its consideration of the item at its twenty-eighth session, it also had before it the report entitled “Disarmament and development”, prepared at the request of the Economic and Social Council by the group of experts on the economic and social consequences of disarmament (see also the section above). Romania again took the lead on the draft resolution, which the General Assembly adopted without a vote. In resolution 3075 (XXVIII), the Assembly envisaged the preparation of an updated study on the matter, to be based on information received from Governments and requested by the Assembly at a later date. It decided to

place the item on the agenda of the thirtieth session. At that session, the General Assembly adopted resolution [3462 \(XXX\)](#) in which it requested the Secretary-General to update the 1972 study with the assistance of qualified consultant experts, taking into account any new developments.

The group of consultant experts appointed by the Secretary-General met in 1976 and 1977. Its membership included a mix of economic professors, senior diplomats and government officials. Its report<sup>5</sup> significantly expanded its survey of developments in military systems and the qualitative aspect of the arms race, even as the group continued to struggle with the lack of data on national inventories of conventional arms. On global military spending, they found that the rate of annual increases had slowed over the 1970s, driven by a plateau in United States military spending following the end of the war in Viet Nam. The overall trend, however, remained: a growing transfer of resources to military use. The share of global military spenders in the six largest Powers compared to the rest of the world declined from 84 per cent in 1960 to 73 per cent in 1975. Military spending in developing countries doubled between 1970 and 1975.

The report examined military research and development for the first time and found such spending to be overwhelmingly concentrated in the two largest Powers. They also assessed for the first time the qualitative and quantitative character of the arms trade, finding that recipients of conventional arms exports were evenly divided among three groups: advanced industrial countries, oil-exporting countries in the Middle East and all other developing countries. They also found a rapid rise in the export of major conventional weapons to developing countries in the period under review and the increasing commercialization of the arms export market. The six largest military spenders also accounted for over 90 per cent of military exports worldwide, of which 95 per cent were exported to developing countries.

---

<sup>5</sup> [A/32/88/Rev.1](#).

The General Assembly's reaction to the updated report was similar to its reception of the original. In resolution 32/75, adopted without a vote on 12 December 1977, the Assembly, inter alia, welcomed with satisfaction the updated report and recommended that Governments widely distribute it, that its conclusions be brought to the attention of the public and that it be taken into account in future disarmament negotiations. The Assembly reaffirmed its decision to keep the matter under constant review and transmitted the report to the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

*First special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, 1978*

The declaration adopted by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament included a paragraph on the economic and social consequences of the arms race (its plan of action also included language on the reduction of military budgets, as addressed in the next section):

In a world of finite resources there is a close relationship between expenditure on armaments and economic and social development. Military expenditures are reaching ever higher levels, the highest percentage of which can be attributed to the nuclear-weapon States and most of their allies, with prospects of further expansion and the danger of further increases in the expenditures of other countries. The hundreds of billions of dollars spent annually on the manufacture or improvement of weapons are in sombre and dramatic contrast to the want and poverty in which two-thirds of the world's population live. This colossal waste of resources is even more serious in that it diverts to military purposes not only material but also technical and human resources which are urgently needed for development in all countries, particularly in the developing countries. Thus, the economic and social consequences of the arms race are so detrimental that its continuation is

obviously incompatible with the implementation of the new international economic order based on justice, equity and co-operation. Consequently, resources released as a result of the implementation of disarmament measures should be used in a manner which will help to promote the well-being of all peoples and to improve the economic conditions of the developing countries.<sup>6</sup>

The special session also requested the Secretary-General to “periodically submit reports to the General Assembly on the economic and social consequences of the armaments race and its extremely harmful effects on world peace and security”.<sup>7</sup> Future reports by the Secretary-General on this item and updates to the 1972 study, however, were only prepared after they were explicitly requested in resolutions of the General Assembly.

### *Third study, 1977–1982*

The General Assembly requested a further update to the study in resolution [35/141](#), adopted on 12 December 1980 without a vote. In introducing the resolution, Romania stated that a further update was necessary in light of important qualitative and quantitative developments in the arms race since the second report was issued in 1977, including the acceleration in its pace, the continued accumulation of arms and the unchecked increase in military expenditures.<sup>8</sup>

The third report<sup>9</sup> was prepared between July 1981 and July 1982 by a group of consultant experts appointed by the Secretary-General. The composition of the third group was similar to that of the second in that it comprised a mix of economics professors, senior diplomats and government officials. The group found that global military expenditures remained around 6 per cent of total world output, despite

---

<sup>6</sup> [A/S-10/4](#), para. 16.

<sup>7</sup> [A/S-10/4](#), para. 93 (c).

<sup>8</sup> [A/C.1/35/PV.31](#).

<sup>9</sup> [A/37/386](#).

a slowdown in global economic growth in the time period covered by the study. The share of global military spenders in the six largest Powers compared to the rest of the world declined slightly to just under 70 per cent. The two largest Powers continued to dominate spending on military research and development.

The General Assembly addressed the updated report in resolution [37/70](#), adopted on 9 December 1982 without a vote. Its reactions to the first and second reports were the same. The Assembly reaffirmed its decision to keep the item under constant review and to include it on the agenda of the fortieth session.

In introducing the resolution requesting a further updated study at the fortieth session, Romania pointed to the escalation in the production, acquisition and stockpiling of arms, as well as the detrimental impact of excessive military spending in fuelling recession, unemployment, inflation and budgetary and trade deficits.<sup>10</sup> It is also notable that the Group held its final session one month following the historic peace march and rally in New York City, which drew, by some accounts, one million people under the call “to support the United Nations special session on disarmament and to call for a freeze and reduction of all nuclear weapons *and a transfer of military budgets to human needs*”.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Fourth study and the loss of consensus, 1985–1988*

The General Assembly adopted resolution [40/150](#) on 16 December 1985 by a vote of 139 to 1, with 7 abstentions.<sup>12</sup> For the first time since 1971, there was no consensus on the item. In its explanation of vote, the United States said that it did not believe that developments since the third report in 1982

---

<sup>10</sup> [A/C.1/40/PV.35](#).

<sup>11</sup> Joyce Wadler and Merrill Brown, “[New York Rally Draws Half-Million](#)”, *The Washington Post*, 13 June 1982.

<sup>12</sup> The United States voted against. The seven abstentions were from Belgium, France, Germany (Federal Republic of), Grenada, Luxembourg, Netherlands and United Kingdom. See [A/40/PV.117](#).

warranted a further update, especially in light of the fact that the report would cost in excess of \$1 million. France abstained as it considered the mandate to duplicate the work on disarmament and development of the International Conference on disarmament and development. Similarly, the United Kingdom abstained as it would have preferred to defer consideration of a new study until after the conclusion of the aforementioned Conference.<sup>13</sup>

In light of financial difficulties facing the United Nations in 1986, the Secretary-General was compelled to defer work on updating the report until 1987. That year, Romania introduced a draft resolution at the forty-first session regretting the deferment and reauthorizing the updated study, which the General Assembly adopted as resolution 41/86 I on 4 December 1986 by a vote of 138 to 1, with 11 abstentions.<sup>14</sup>

The group of consultant experts appointed by the Secretary-General prepared the updated report<sup>15</sup> between March 1987 and April 1988. In the period since the last report (1982–1985), the group found that the share in global military spending of the six largest Powers compared to the rest of the world had risen back to above 70 per cent, driven by accelerating growth in military spending in those countries and a decline in developing countries. Globally, growth in military spending outpaced growth with world gross domestic product during this time frame, remaining around 6 per cent of total world output. However, military spending in developing countries declined, which the group attributed to various social, political and economic factors. The decline was largest for oil exporting countries in the Middle East, which the group attributed to decreases in oil prices and export revenues. As

---

<sup>13</sup> [A/C.1/40/PV.42](#).

<sup>14</sup> The United States again voted against. The abstentions included Australia, Belgium, France, Germany (Federal Republic of), Ghana, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Saudi Arabia and United Kingdom.

<sup>15</sup> [A/43/368](#).

expected, these declines were matched by decreasing arms transfers to developing countries.

The group also reported that expenditures on military research and development grew by 80 per cent between 1980 and 1984, while 90 per cent of such expenditures remained limited to the six largest military spenders. The report included an analysis of the arms industry and production. The group observed that the industry was both highly concentrated in a small number of States but also internationalized, finding that the availability of a foreign exchange for arms was an important precondition for the development of a domestic arms industry.

The General Assembly addressed the updated report in resolution [43/78 J](#), introduced by Romania<sup>16</sup> and adopted on 7 December 1988 by a vote of 143 to 1, with 9 abstentions.<sup>17</sup> The operative text of the resolution was unchanged from the previous version. The Assembly's reaction was the same as in previous reports. The Assembly also again reaffirmed its decision to keep the item under constant review and to include it on the agenda of the forty-sixth session.

In explanation of its vote against the resolution, the United States said this was not a reflection of the study but the language of resolution, which it felt was not in close alignment with the group's report. The United States also considered that the assertion that military spending led to economic problems "ignored the fact that arms are the direct result of tensions and problems".<sup>18</sup> The Netherlands, which abstained, explained that they considered the matter to have been adequately dealt with

---

<sup>16</sup> Under the title "Review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its 10th special session".

<sup>17</sup> The United States again voted against. The abstentions included Belgium, France, Germany (Federal Republic of), Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and United Kingdom.

<sup>18</sup> [A/C.1/43/PV.36](#).



and that further inclusion of the item on the agenda was not justified.

Pursuant to resolution [43/78 J](#), the item was included on the agenda of the forty-sixth session in 1991 as a sub-item entitled “Review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session”. The session took place during a period of major political change and advances in nuclear arms control. No draft resolution was submitted under the item and there has been no request to include it on the agenda of any subsequent session of the General Assembly.

## Reduction of military budgets (1973–1989)

### *Reduction of military budgets of the permanent members of the Security Council, 1973–1974*

In September 1973, after the beginning of the twenty-eighth session of the General Assembly, the Soviet Union requested the inclusion of an additional item on the agenda entitled “Reduction of the military budgets of States permanent members of the Security Council by 10 per cent and utilization of part of the funds thus saved to provide assistance to developing countries”.<sup>1</sup>

In the letter requesting the item and forwarding a draft resolution, the Soviet Union cited recent favourable developments, such as the agreement ending the war in Viet Nam, which were occurring at the same time as other events which were undermining international security. This included the continuation of the arms race and “huge sums” being spent for military purposes. The Soviet Union viewed reduction of military budgets as military détente that should accompany the political détente to strengthen progress that had recently been made in improving the international situation.

The General Assembly ultimately adopted the Soviet-drafted text as resolution [3093 \(XXVIII\) A](#) on 7 December 1973

---

<sup>1</sup> [A/9191](#).

by a vote of 83 to 2, with 38 abstentions. It recommended a 10 per cent reduction of the military budgets of the permanent members of the Security Council during the next financial year. It also established a Special Committee on the Distribution of the Funds Released as a Result of the Reduction of Military Budgets comprised of the permanent members of the Security Council plus three countries from each of the regional groups of Africa, Asia and Latin America and two from each of the regional groups of Eastern Europe and Western Europe and others.<sup>2</sup> The mandate of the Special Committee was to distribute funds on an equitable basis, bearing in mind the urgent needs and requirements of recipient countries. China, France, the United Kingdom and the United States declined to participate in the Special Committee and it never met formally.<sup>3</sup>

The United States abstained from the Soviet resolution as it considered there was no standard concept for measuring military expenditures, there would be no means of verifying the proposed reductions and that it would not be useful to link the size of a country's military budget to its duty to provide development aid or to the amount of development funds it makes available. China, France and the United Kingdom also abstained. China was especially vocal in its opposition to the initiative.

In light of concern that the Soviet proposal would not achieve its stated objectives, Alfonso García Robles of Mexico introduced a complementary proposal under the same agenda item,<sup>4</sup> which the General Assembly adopted as resolution [3093](#)

---

<sup>2</sup> Appointed by the President of the General Assembly in accordance with the resolution, the other members of the Special Committee were Ethiopia, Mali and Nigeria; India, Laos and Syrian Arab Republic; Barbados, Brazil and Chile; German Democratic Republic and Poland.

<sup>3</sup> See [A/PV.2194](#), paras. 97–115. See also “Reduction of the military budgets of States permanent members of the Security Council by 10 per cent and utilization of part of the funds thus saved to provide assistance to developing countries: Note by the Secretary-General” ([A/9800](#)).

<sup>4</sup> See [A/PV.2179](#), para. 143–152.

(XXVIII) B on 7 December 1973 by a vote of 93 to 2, with 26 abstentions.<sup>5</sup> In the resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare, with the assistance of qualified consultant experts, reports on the reduction of the military budgets of the permanent members of the Security Council and other States with a major military and economic potential, and on the utilization of a part of the funds thus saved to provide international assistance to developing countries.

The group of consultant experts established pursuant to resolution 3093 (XXVIII) B met in 1974 and was chaired by the Director of the Disarmament Affairs Division of the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs. Its report<sup>6</sup> also took into account the Soviet-drafted resolution (3093 (XXVIII) A) and the discussions on the item in the General Assembly. The group considered that reaching agreement on the scope and content of military budgets was a prerequisite for negotiations on reducing military budgets; they considered some of the conceptual challenges in this regard and proposed a means for accounting for military expenditures.<sup>7</sup> The group also considered that agreement on the reduction of military budgets would be an important partial measure for disarmament.

At its twenty-ninth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 3254 (XXIX) on 9 December 1974 by a vote of 99 to 2, with 12 abstentions, to follow up on the report of the group of consultant experts. As reflected in the text, the sponsors considered that States needed more time to review the report.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the resolution only sought the views of Member States and placed the item on the agenda of the next session.

---

<sup>5</sup> The United States supported in principle Mexico's initiative for a study, but it abstained as it could not accept the expression of urgency on the matter, nor did it accept distinguishing permanent members of the Security Council from major military Powers. See [A/PV.2194](#), para. 97–115.

<sup>6</sup> [A/9770/Rev.1](#).

<sup>7</sup> See [A/9770/Rev.1](#), annex II.

<sup>8</sup> See also [A/C.1/PV.2027](#).

The United Kingdom and United States voted in favour of the resolution. China and France continued to abstain. The Soviet Union also abstained as it objected to the notion that more time was needed to assess the substance of the report of the expert group.

*Development of the standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures, 1974–1980*

From this point forward, the Mexican initiative, which started with 3093 (XXVIII) B, diverged from the primary purpose initially sought by the Soviet Union. Whereas the Eastern bloc sought an early reduction of military budgets in the major Powers, the track initiative by Mexico became focused on developing methods and means for accurately accounting for and comparing military expenditures, as a preliminary step for facilitating agreement on the reduction of military budgets. In this connection, in resolution 3254 (XXIX), the Assembly did not continue with an agenda item focused on the military expenditures of the permanent members of the Security Council, as part of this shift toward a focus on the more general objective of reducing military budgets.

Accordingly, in the resolution introduced by Mexico at the thirtieth session, entitled simply “Implementation of General Assembly resolution 3254 (XXIX)”, the Assembly requested a further report by the Secretary-General, to be prepared with the assistance of a group of qualified experts, containing an in-depth analysis and examination of various matters relating to objectively measuring and comparing military budgets.<sup>9</sup> The Assembly also appealed to all States, in particular the

---

<sup>9</sup> As specified in the resolution, the new report should address issues of the definition and scope of the military sector and of military expenditures, differences in how military resources are valued, how differences in inflation affect prices and military production, and how the relationship between exchange rates affects accurate currency comparison of military expenditures.

permanent members of the Security Council, as well as any other State with comparable military expenditures, to strive to reach agreed reductions of their military budgets. The General Assembly adopted the text as resolution [3463 \(XXX\)](#) on 11 December 1975 by a vote of 108 to 2, with 21 abstentions.<sup>10</sup> In that resolution, the Assembly notably requested for the first time the inclusion of an agenda item entitled “Reduction of military budgets”.

The report of the group of experts on the reduction of military budgets was completed in September 1976 and entitled “Measurement and international report of military expenditures”.<sup>11</sup> Through its extensive analysis, the group developed an international reporting instrument for military expenditures, which it recommended should be operationalized, tested and refined in subsequent phases of work. In its view, this would set the stage for further discussions on limitations of military expenditures, including on matters of verification, as well as on how to utilize part of the resources released for social and economic developments, particularly in developing countries.

Over the next several years, the General Assembly took successive steps to bring the reporting instrument into operation. In 1976, the Assembly sought the views of Member

---

<sup>10</sup> Albania and China voted against. The abstentions came from the members of the Eastern bloc and from Western States, including France, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as several other members of NATO. The Soviet Union abstained as it considered the resolution only to seek a technical study and not actual reductions. It also objected to the call for “unilateral reductions” in only two countries and not in the five permanent members of the Security Council, as called for in resolution 3093 A ([A/C.1/PV.2107](#), pp. 52–56). The United Kingdom was in favour of the study to make progress toward a standardized instrument, but it would have preferred it to be undertaken with the Committee on Disarmament and not by an expert group under the auspices of the Secretary-General ([A/C.1/PV.2107](#), pp. 57–60). The United States objected to the fact the resolution singled out only two states ([A/C.1/PV.2107](#), pp. 61–62).

<sup>11</sup> [A/31/222/Rev.1](#).

States, including information on military accounting practices and reactions to the proposed reporting instrument, and requested the Secretary-General to prepare an analysis of those views with the assistance of an international group of budgetary experts.<sup>12</sup> In its report,<sup>13</sup> the group found that the views of States reaffirmed the validity of the concepts of the reporting instrument contained in the 1976 report and it suggested only some minor modifications and issues that would require further consideration. It considered that further pilot testing by States was still necessary, however. The group also stressed the importance of keeping in mind that the basic aim of the exercise was to achieve agreement on reducing military budgets in line with resolutions 3093 (XXVIII) A and B.

In 1977, the Assembly deemed that work on the reduction of military budgets had reached a “decisive stage” and that it was time for practical steps to be taken to test and refine the proposed reporting instrument.<sup>14</sup> Although some preferred more immediate action,<sup>15</sup> in resolution 32/85, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to determine which States would participate in a pilot test of the standardized instrument and to prepare a background report for the first special session of the

---

<sup>12</sup> Resolution 31/87 of 14 December 1976 adopted by a vote of 120 to 2, with 11 abstentions. Albania and China again voted against and the Eastern bloc continued to abstain. The Soviet Union again called for the pursuit of an agreement on the reduction of military budgets by a fixed amount and regarded the pursuit of the standardized instrument as “a policy designed for further delaying technical research into the military expenditures of States ... [diverting] us more and more from the political solutions which we need if we want to reduce military budgets” (A/C.1/31/PV.47, p. 68).

<sup>13</sup> A/32/194.

<sup>14</sup> Resolution 32/85 of 12 December 1977 adopted by a vote of 120 to 2, with 13 abstentions. The voting pattern was the same as resolution 31/87.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Belgium on behalf of the European Community (A/C.1/32/PV.37), pp. 31–33.

General Assembly devoted to disarmament.<sup>16</sup> The resolution also included text, added through an amendment proposed by the United States, recognizing the value that a standardized instrument would have for achieving agreement on the reduction of military expenditures.<sup>17</sup>

In this period, the Soviet Union maintained a persistent objection to the pursuit of work on the standardized instrument, as it felt that this distracted from political efforts to seek reductions in military budgets. It criticized the various studies on the development of the instruments as complex and contradictory, focused only on developing methodology for comparing the military potential of States. Accordingly, Eastern European States would generally abstain from the resolutions on the instrument and declined to participate in it for the remainder of the cold war, until resolution [44/116 E](#) of 15 November 1989.<sup>18</sup>

The plan of action adopted at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament stated that the gradual and mutually agreed reduction of military budgets, in absolute terms or in terms of percentage points,<sup>19</sup> would contribute to curbing the arms race and would increase the possibility of reallocating resources to social and economic development.<sup>20</sup> It also stated that the Assembly should continue

---

<sup>16</sup> That report is contained in document [A/S-10/6](#) and reflects qualified and unqualified expressions of willingness to participate in the pilot by Australia, Austria, Barbados, Canada, Finland, Germany (Federal Republic of), Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States.

<sup>17</sup> See [A/32/378](#), para. 6 and [A/C.1/32/PV.37](#), p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> For examples of the Soviet position, see [A/C.1/PV.2107](#), pp. 52–56 and [A/C.1/31/PV.47](#), p. 68.

<sup>19</sup> The Soviet Union sought inclusion of this qualification to its original proposal in order to overcome Western arguments about the incompatibility of the military budgets of States as an impediment to seeking agreement on reducing military budgets. See [A/C.1/34/PV.38](#), 72–75.

<sup>20</sup> [A/S-10/4](#), para. 89.



to consider what concrete steps should be taken to facilitate the reduction of military budgets.<sup>21</sup> At its next regular session in 1978, the General Assembly built upon this outcome in resolution 33/67, adopted by a vote of 121 to none, with 18 abstentions, on 14 December 1978. In that resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, with the assistance of an ad hoc panel of experienced practitioners in the field of military budgeting to carry out a practical test of the proposed reporting instrument with States from different regions and with different budgeting and accounting systems.

The ad hoc panel on military budgeting pursued and completed its test of the proposed reporting instrument in 1979 and 1980, and it submitted its report, including its assessment and recommendations, to the thirty-fifth session.<sup>22</sup> While acknowledging that only a limited number of States participated in the test (and in fact, none did so from the Eastern bloc), the panel concluded that the instrument was a viable and practical means for international reporting of military expenditures. It recommended that the General Assembly take steps leading to the early implementation of the revised report instrument.

By resolution 35/142 B, introduced by Sweden and adopted on 12 December 1980 by a vote of 113 to none, with 21 abstentions, the General Assembly recognized that a carefully elaborated reporting instrument was now available for general and regular implementation. It thus adopted the system for standardized reporting of military expenditures as tested. The Assembly also recommended that all Member States make use of the reporting instrument and report annually to the Secretary-General their military expenditures of the latest fiscal year for which data are available.

---

<sup>21</sup> A/S-10/4, para. 90.

<sup>22</sup> A/35/479.

*Dual-tracks: Refinement of the standardized instrument, 1980–1985*

From 1980 to 1989, as signified in resolutions [35/142 A](#) and [B](#), the General Assembly pursued a dual-track approach on the reduction of military budgets. This entailed on one hand increased transparency in military expenditures through the use of the standardized instrument endorsed in resolution [35/142 B](#), its refinement and the development of means for comparing military spending between countries over time, as described in this section. The second track, as described in the next section, entailed the continued effort within the Disarmament Commission to seek agreement on principles pertaining to the elaboration of an agreement on the reduction of military budgets.

By resolution [35/142 B](#), the Assembly also requested the Secretary-General, with the assistance of an ad hoc group of qualified experts in the field of military budgets, to further refine the instrument and to examine how to compare military expenditures between States and between different years, as well as problems of verification that might arise in connection with agreements on reducing military expenditures. The group of experts on the reduction of military budgets met in 1981 and 1982. The major substantive sections of its report<sup>23</sup> analysed the views of States on how to further refine the instrument,<sup>24</sup> the means of comparing spending between countries over time and the issue of verification.<sup>25</sup>

With respect to the comparison of military budgets, the group found that, as with the civilian economy, prices change

---

<sup>23</sup> [A/S-12/7](#).

<sup>24</sup> Further to this analysis, the group proposed some minor changes to the instrument. See [A/S-12/7](#), para. 59.

<sup>25</sup> The group discussed various methods for verification and concluded that such measures in any agreement on the reduction of military expenditures would have to apply both to physical objects, such as the numbers of soldiers and equipment, as well as to economic indicators.

over time at different rates in different countries; hence there would be a need to develop appropriate deflators to compare the monetary value of military efforts between countries. They considered that the use of exchange rates for this purpose would not be adequate<sup>26</sup> and that it would be necessary to develop indices for purchasing-power parities applicable to each State's military sector. In accordance with resolution [35/142 B](#), the Secretary-General submitted the report of the group to the second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. However, in light of the limited progress made at the second special session, follow up on this matter would be left to the subsequent regular session of the General Assembly.

Later in 1982, the General Assembly adopted resolution [37/95 B](#) by a vote of 96 to 13, with 9 abstentions, on the basis of a draft introduced by Sweden. Notably, the Eastern bloc, which had abstained in previous iterations of the resolution supporting the development of the standardized instrument, voted against. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to modify the instrument in line with the report of the group of experts on military budgets and to make collection, assembling and publication of data on military expenditures on the basis of the instrument an integral part of his normal statistical services. Moreover, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to establish a further group of qualified experts "to undertake the task of constructing price indices and purchasing-power parities

---

<sup>26</sup> As further elaborated in the 1985 report of the group of experts on the reduction of military budgets, "exchange rates have only a limited bearing on the domestic sector, they are sometimes arbitrary and they are governed by economic policies that affect their reliability as indicators of the relative purchasing power of currencies in their respective domestic markets. Exchange rates may be set either administratively by Governments or by the action of currency markets. There are erratic variations in market exchange rates owing to capital movements, differential rates of inflation and changes in the growth of the technological, productive and selling capacities of countries" ([A/40/421](#), para. 35).

for the military expenditures of participating States” and to submit a study in that regard to the fortieth session.<sup>27</sup>

In its report,<sup>28</sup> the group found its basic task to be feasible and they successfully constructed military purchasing-power parities for 1982, on the basis of its analysis of data supplied by a limited number of States and which it also extrapolated for the years 1980 and 1981. Their calculations were constructed on a “simple basis”, in comparison to techniques used by some Governments to determine price indices for their internal use, in consideration of developing a method that would facilitate future agreement on verified reductions of military expenditures. Importantly, they found their constructed indices for military expenditures to differ from aggregate civilian price indices, underscoring the importance and value in constructing military-specific price indices.

The General Assembly welcomed the report in resolution [40/91 B](#) of 12 December 1985 and requested the views of Member States on it.<sup>29</sup> No State submitted any resolution in 1986 explicitly focused on the standardized instrument, although its existence continued to be acknowledged in the resolution drafted by the United Kingdom entitled “Objective information on military matters”<sup>30</sup> and, from 1990 onwards, these two items were merged and carried forward together (see section below on objective information on military matters).

Somewhat related efforts to develop means for analysing trends in the economic and social impact of military spending were pursued by the Secretariat between 1989 and 1992, further

---

<sup>27</sup> General Assembly resolution [37/95 B](#), para. 5. As further specified in the resolution, the group’s study should include the following: (a) to assess the feasibility of such an exercise; (b) to design the project and methodology to be employed; (c) to determine the types of data required, such as product descriptions, prices and statistical weights; (d) to construct military price indices and purchasing-power parities.

<sup>28</sup> [A/40/421](#).

<sup>29</sup> These views were compiled in [A/41/482](#).

<sup>30</sup> General Assembly resolution [41/59 B](#).

to resolutions [42/45](#) and [43/75](#) B on the relationship between disarmament and development (see next chapter).

*Dual-tracks: Renewed efforts to seek agreed reductions, 1978–1989*

- As the ad hoc panel established pursuant to resolution [33/67](#) continued to test the proposed reporting instrument, the General Assembly also renewed the effort to seek agreement on reductions of military expenditures, building upon the decision of the General Assembly at its first special session devoted to disarmament to consider what concrete steps should be taken to facilitate the reduction of military budgets. The first initiative was proposed by Yugoslavia in 1978.<sup>31</sup> As part of a series of resolutions aimed at implementing decisions and recommendations adopted at the special session, it proposed a mandate for the newly re-established Disarmament Commission to consider an item on harmonization of views on concrete steps for a gradual, agreed reduction of military budgets and reallocation of the funds to economic and social development, particularly for the benefit of developing countries. The General Assembly adopted all four parts of the Yugoslav text as resolution [33/71](#) H, entitled “Disarmament negotiations and machinery”, by a vote of 129 to none, with 13 abstentions. The abstentions were from Western States.
- At its 1979 session, the Disarmament Commission devoted the bulk of its time to the consideration of elements of a comprehensive programme of disarmament, an item on which it was able to achieve consensus.<sup>32</sup>
- Later in 1979, Romania, with the support of neutral and non-aligned countries, launched a complementary initiative

---

<sup>31</sup> [A/C.1/33/PV.50](#), pp. 75–80.

<sup>32</sup> [A/34/42](#).

in the Disarmament Commission. They introduced a new resolution entitled “Freezing and reduction of military budgets”.<sup>33</sup> The resolution apparently sought a path between the positions of the Eastern and Western blocs on the matter. The General Assembly adopted the Romanian text as resolution [34/83 F](#) without a vote on 11 December 1979, which marked the first consensus to be reached within a regular session of the General Assembly on reducing military budgets.<sup>34</sup> In the resolution, the Assembly requested the Disarmament Commission in 1980 to examine and identify effective ways and means of achieving agreements to freeze, reduce or otherwise restrain, in a balanced manner, military expenditures, including adequate measures of verification satisfactory to all parties concerned. The Assembly also appealed to all States, in particular the most heavily armed, pending the achievement of agreed reductions, to exercise self-restraint in military expenditures, with a view to reallocating saved funds to economic and social development, particularly for the benefit of developing countries.

The Soviet Union continued to regard the effort for “standardized reporting on military expenditures” to be a distraction from the objective of seeking reductions and it called for separate votes on the two paragraphs referring to it and to the need to develop adequate verification. On the other hand, delegations of Western States expressed satisfaction with the approach in the resolution because it recognized that the availability of standardized reporting of military expenditures would facilitate reductions. The United States supported the initiative, stressing that it had sought to bring about conditions and develop means for agreement on reducing military expenditures, but also stating that, “under the present

---

<sup>33</sup> See [A/C.1/34/PV.35](#), pp. 2–5. The lead sponsors on the resolution were Austria, Indonesia, Nigeria, Peru, Romania, Rwanda, Senegal and Sweden.

<sup>34</sup> See [A/C.1/34/PV.38](#), pp. 71–82.

circumstances, no limitation is practicable”. India abstained from the resolution as a whole in the First Committee as it believed the call for reductions should be directed at the five or six largest spenders.

The 1980 session of the Disarmament Commission took up both the items originally proposed by Yugoslavia and Romania,<sup>35</sup> although it spent the majority of its time that year on the elaboration of a declaration on the declaration of the 1980s as the Second Disarmament Decade.<sup>36</sup> Romania and Sweden, did, however, submit a joint proposal on freezing and reduction of military expenditures.<sup>37</sup> The Commission recommended that the General Assembly should mandate it to continue its consideration of the items, to identify and elaborate the principles that should govern further actions related to freezing and reduction of military expenditures.

In accordance with resolution 36/82 A, adopted on 9 December 1980 without a vote, and subsequent resolutions,<sup>38</sup> the Disarmament Commission continued its consideration of the two items as sub-items under “Reduction of military budgets” through its 1989 session.<sup>39</sup> Throughout this period, the Soviet

---

<sup>35</sup> The Commission only devoted four meetings to the reduction of military spending in 1980.

<sup>36</sup> A/35/42.

<sup>37</sup> A/CN.10/14. Their proposal outlined elements for a political declaration which outlined general principles for an eventual international agreement to verifiably freeze and reduce military spending.

<sup>38</sup> General Assembly resolutions 36/82 A, 37/95 A, 38/184 A, 39/64 A, 40/91 A, 41/57, 42/36 and 43/73.

<sup>39</sup> Between 1980 and 1986, the two sub-items under “Reduction of military budgets” were the following:

(a) Harmonization of views on concrete steps to be undertaken by States regarding a gradual, agreed reduction of military budgets and reallocation of resources now being used for military purposes to economic and social development, particularly for the benefit of the developing countries, noting the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly;

(b) Examination and identification of effective ways and means of achieving agreements to freeze, reduce or otherwise restrain, in a

Union continued to press for the initiation of negotiations on an agreement to reduce military budgets, either as a percentage or in absolute figures of similar magnitude, without the necessity of verification. Western States continued to insist that agreed reductions could only be based on the principles of transparency and comparability, achieved through the regular availability of meaningful and reliable data, and that the sustained and widespread use of the standardized instrument on reporting military expenditures was an essential first step and precondition in that regard.

In 1981, the Commission first established a working group on the item and, from this point onwards, the focus in the Commission was on the elaboration of principles that should govern further actions of States in the field of freezing and reduction of military expenditures.<sup>40</sup> Towards this end, Romania and Sweden submitted a working paper that included a draft declaration for adoption by the General Assembly.<sup>41</sup> The Commission considered but was unable to reach agreement on the content of a background paper compiled by the Chair containing some of the principles proposed.<sup>42</sup>

The Commission continued its consideration of this item in 1982, but it continued to face divergences of views on how to pursue international agreement on achieving reductions. It ultimately recommended that the Commission should continue

---

balanced manner, military expenditures, including adequate measures of verification satisfactory to all parties concerned, taking into account the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 34/83 F, 35/142 A [etc.] and, in particular, to identify and elaborate on the principles which should govern further actions of States in the field of the freezing and reduction of military expenditures, keeping in mind the possibility of embodying such principles into a suitable document at an appropriate stage.

<sup>40</sup> Egypt chaired the working group in 1981. Romania and Bahamas co-chaired the working group in 1982. Romania chaired the working group from 1983 to 1989.

<sup>41</sup> [A/CN.10/26](#).

<sup>42</sup> [A/36/42](#), para. 20 and annex I.



its consideration on the item at subsequent sessions,<sup>43</sup> also taking into account proposals India submitted in a working paper.<sup>44</sup>

In 1983, the Chair of the working group submitted a set of suggestions of formulations for several of the ideas and proposals based on the discussion during the session.<sup>45</sup> In 1984, the working group was able to find general acceptance on many principles and ideas, on a provisional basis and subject to agreement on the whole. Some important divergences persisted, however, on some of the proposed principles and ideas.<sup>46</sup> In 1985, the working group was able to broaden the agreement on many principles that had been accepted provisionally.<sup>47</sup> In 1986, the Commission achieved consensus on many of the outstanding contested formulations. It notably remained unable to reach consensus on a single consolidated paragraph dealing with transparency, comparability and availability of meaningful and reliable data.<sup>48</sup> In 1987, the Commission was unable to reach consensus on the outstanding paragraph and was thus unable to reach agreement on the principles as a whole.<sup>49</sup> In 1989, it was able to agree on most elements in the outstanding paragraph, but

---

<sup>43</sup> See the report of the Disarmament Commission to the twelfth special session of the General Assembly ([A/S-12/3](#)). See also the regular report of the session ([A/37/42](#)).

<sup>44</sup> [A/CN.10/35](#).

<sup>45</sup> Contained in document [A/CN.10/1983/WG.1/WP.2](#). See [A/38/42](#).

<sup>46</sup> [A/39/42](#). Subsequently, the General Assembly, in resolution [39/64 A](#), subsequently requested the Commission to finalize the identification and elaboration of the principles.

<sup>47</sup> [A/40/42](#). Subsequently, the General Assembly, in resolution [40/91 A](#), again requested the Commission to finalize the principles.

<sup>48</sup> [A/41/42](#). Subsequently, the General Assembly, in resolution [41/57](#), requested the Commission to conclude its work on the last outstanding paragraph.

<sup>49</sup> [A/42/42](#). Subsequently, the General Assembly, in resolution [42/36](#), again requested the Commission to conclude its work on the last outstanding paragraph.

was unable to reach consensus on every aspect, and thus there continued to be no final agreement on all the principles.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the lack of final agreement, in the resolution on the reduction of military budgets submitted by Romania at the forty-fourth session,<sup>51</sup> the General Assembly welcomed the work of the Disarmament Commission on this item, took note of the principles contained in its report, annexed those principles to the resolution and decided to bring them to the attention of Member States and the Conference on Disarmament as “useful guidelines for further action in the field of freezing and reduction of military budgets”. Consequently, a number of Western States were no longer able to support the resolution, which they felt circumvented the outcome in the Disarmament Commission and included text that reflected the view on the use of the standardized instrument on military spending as a first step and precondition for negotiations on the reduction of military budgets.<sup>52</sup>

The General Assembly adopted the text drafted by Romania by a vote of 116 to 10, with 19 abstentions, as resolution 44/114 A on 15 November 1989. Following the adoption of this resolution, neither the General Assembly nor the Disarmament Commission took any further steps towards seeking agreement on the reduction of military budgets and, in this connection, turned their attention exclusively to the track dealing with transparency in military spending.

The item “Reduction of military budgets” has remained on the agenda of the General Assembly in accordance with resolution 35/142 B.<sup>53</sup> No proposals have been submitted and

---

<sup>50</sup> A/S-15/3.

<sup>51</sup> A/C.1/44/PV.27.

<sup>52</sup> See A/C.1/44/PV.38.

<sup>53</sup> In that resolution, the General Assembly recommended that Member States report annually to the Secretary-General their military expenditures of the latest fiscal year for which data were available and requested the Secretary-General to report on those matters to the

no action taken by the General Assembly under the sub-item “Reduction of military budgets” since the forty-fourth session in 1989.

*Objective information on military matters, 1989–present*

Paragraph 105 of the outcome document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament stated that “Member States should be encouraged to ensure a better flow of information with regard to the various aspects of disarmament to avoid dissemination of false and tendentious information concerning armaments, and to concentrate on the danger of escalation of the armaments race and on the need for general and complete disarmament under effective international control.”<sup>54</sup>

The winding down of the cold war gave impetus to the goal of increasing transparency on military spending and arms transfers while simultaneously establishing these aims as stand-alone objectives apart from any near-term purpose of facilitating agreement on reductions.

At the same session that the General Assembly endorsed the principles considered in the Disarmament Commission on principles for the reduction of military budgets, in 1989, the United Kingdom introduced the draft resolution “Objective information on military matters”, which it co-authored with the Soviet Union. The draft, which the General Assembly adopted as resolution 44/116 E, requested the Disarmament Commission to include on its agenda for 1990 an item of the same title.<sup>55</sup> In

---

Assembly on an annual basis. The sub-item is included annually on the agenda of the General Assembly pursuant to that request.

<sup>54</sup> A/S-10/4.

<sup>55</sup> Resolution 44/116 E was adopted by a vote of 132 to none, with 13 abstentions. Abstentions were largely from Arab States, but also included Cuba and India. In explanations of vote, India, Brazil and Iraq separately expressed the view that transparency on military expenditures was a secondary concern in comparison to achieving reductions. See A/C.1/44/PV.36.

introducing the draft resolution, the United Kingdom explained that the text reflected developments over the past year, including the new standard of openness, acceptance of the standard instrument for reporting military expenditures and the role of openness and transparency in enhancing security.<sup>56</sup>

The Disarmament Commission considered the item “Objective information on military matters” between 1990 and 1992. In 1992, the Commission agreed by consensus on guidelines and recommendations for objective information on military matters.<sup>57</sup> With respect to the provision of such information, the guidelines and recommendations addressed objectives, principles for actions by States and the mechanisms to be promoted by the United Nations. One of the recommendations addressed the standardized system of reporting on military expenditures and stated that it should continue in operation and could be further improved as a global basis for the provision of objective and comprehensively comparable information on such expenditures. The General Assembly endorsed the guidelines and recommendations in resolution 47/54 B of 9 December 1992.<sup>58</sup>

Since 1993, Germany and Romania have jointly led on the resolution supporting the standardized instrument on military expenditures. In 1993, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution 48/62, entitled “Reduction of military budgets: transparency of military expenditures”, which focused entirely on the standardized report on military expenditures.<sup>59</sup> In the resolution, the Assembly welcomed the recent progress made in arms limitations and disarmament, “which, in the long term, will

---

<sup>56</sup> A/C.1/44/PV.29.

<sup>57</sup> A/47/42, annex I.

<sup>58</sup> Resolution 47/54 B also requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the guidelines and recommendations.

<sup>59</sup> In the latter connection, the preamble cited only resolutions 35/142 B, in which the General Assembly endorsed the standardized instrument on military expenditures, as well as 46/25 and 47/54 on objective information on military matters.

lead to significant reductions in military expenditures”. It also expressed conviction that the end of East-West confrontation would promote further openness and transparency in military matters and that that in turn would strengthen international peace and security. In the primary objective paragraph, the Assembly called on all Member States to participate in the United Nations system for the standardized reporting of military expenditures.

From 1994 onwards, the two agenda items previously entitled “Reduction of military budgets” and “Objective information on military matters”, were merged in a new resolution, entitled “Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures”. Resolution [48/62](#) and the follow-up resolutions in 1994 and 1996<sup>60</sup> also sought the views of Member States on the ways and means to strengthen and broaden participation in the standardized reporting system. However, the level of participation in the instrument remained limited for the remainder of the decade, with only about 30 States reporting annually.

Serious efforts to broaden participation in the instrument would wait until after 1997, following the Secretary-General’s re-establishment of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and his efforts to revive progress in disarmament and development (see also the Part V).<sup>61</sup> That year, by resolution [52/32](#), the General Assembly endorsed the intention of the Secretary-General to convene consultations with relevant international and regional organizations to discuss the structure of the

---

<sup>60</sup> General Assembly resolution [49/66](#) and [51/38](#). The latter resolution also sought more specifically views and recommendations from Member States on necessary changes to the content and structure of the instrument.

<sup>61</sup> The Secretary-General reported that consultations had not been possible in 1996 due to the financial situation of the Organization. The Secretary-General nonetheless expressed the view that an update of the instrument may be necessary to take into account different national reporting practices. See [A/52/302](#).

standardized instrument, the reporting capacity of Governments, the process of overseeing the reporting system and the incentives for Governments to participate. The Secretary-General convened those consultations in 1998 and his report contained a number of recommendations.<sup>62</sup>

The General Assembly expressed appreciation for the 1998 report of the Secretary-General in resolution [53/72](#) and it requested the Secretary-General to take a number of new actions, including the following: to resume the practice of sending an annual note verbale to Member States requesting the submission of data to the reporting system; to promote international and regional symposiums and training seminars on the instrument; to continue consultations on how the instrument could be adjusted to achieve wider participation; and to make recommendations on necessary changes to the content and structure of the instrument on the basis of those consultations.

Although there are no signs that the Secretariat ever attempted to develop any recommendations on the contents and structure of the instrument despite being requested to do so in two successive resolutions,<sup>63</sup> it did eventually initiate regular outreach events, regional seminars and workshops aimed at promoting wider participation in the instrument in

---

<sup>62</sup> [A/53/218](#). The five major recommendations in the report included the following: (a) raise the profile of the United Nations standardized reporting system; (b) elicit the views of Member States regarding obstacles to their participation; (c) provide incentives to Member States to participate; (d) eliminate technical impediments; (e) enhance the complementarity of and cooperation among different international and regional instruments.

<sup>63</sup> General Assembly resolution [53/72](#), operative para. 8, and General Assembly resolution [54/43](#), operative para. 8: “Requests the Secretary-General to make recommendations, based on the outcome of those consultations and taking into account the views of Member States, on necessary changes to the content and structure of the United Nations system for the standardized reporting of military expenditures in order to strengthen and broaden participation, and to submit a report on the subject to the General Assembly.”

years in which it was able to obtain extrabudgetary funding.<sup>64</sup> Participation in the instrument steadily increased in subsequent years. In 2001, the main sponsors of the resolution began the practice of introducing the draft on a biennial basis and in 2003 they reorganized the structure of the operative paragraphs “for better understanding and a more logical flow of statements and recommendations”.<sup>65</sup> The content of the operative paragraphs were generally unchanged, however, in comparison to recent editions of the resolution.

The biennial resolution<sup>66</sup> remained substantively unchanged until resolution 62/13 in 2007, when the sponsors decided to include a request for a group of governmental experts to review the operation and further development of the standardized instrument. As rationale, the sponsors noted that the reporting system had remained unchanged<sup>67</sup> since it launched in 1981 and that the current instrument lacked a means to facilitate comparing and assessing reported data in a user-friendly way. They noted in particular that “Important supplementary data — for example, defence expenditures as a proportion of total budget and gross domestic product, rates of inflation and budget estimates for the following years — are not collected. A certain level of assessment of the data provided could also be useful.”<sup>68</sup>

The group of governmental experts met in 2010 and 2011 and comprised 15 members, including a mix of defence and foreign affairs officials, diplomats and other experts. The major focus of its report<sup>69</sup> was on means of achieving greater

---

<sup>64</sup> See A/56/267, paras. 6 and 7; A/57/263, paras. 5 and 6; A/58/202, para. 5; A/59/192, para. 5; A/60/159, para. 5. The Secretariat reported that no extrabudgetary funding was available in 2006 and 2007 (A/61/133, para. 4; A/62/158, para. 4).

<sup>65</sup> A/C.1/58/PV.14, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> General Assembly resolution 56/14 of 29 November 2001, 58/28 of 8 December 2003 and 60/44 of 8 December 2005.

<sup>67</sup> The Secretariat introduced a simplified reporting form in 2002.

<sup>68</sup> A/C.1/62/PV.20, p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> A/66/89.

participation, in light of possible impediments in this connection caused by the incompatibility of accounting methods, the complexity of the reporting form, lack of capacity and the sensitivity of military matters. In this connection, much of the group's report described its consideration of various means of modifying the reporting form. The group recommended a number of recommendations on the standardized and simplified reporting forms, including the consolidation and removal of various elements. It also recommended that the Secretariat, *inter alia*, continue to raise awareness, overhaul the existing database to make it more user-friendly and to increase its functionality, and continue regional outreach. The group also recommended renaming the instrument the "United Nations Report on Military Expenditures".

Aside from the general recommendation directed at the Office for Disarmament Affairs on overhauling the database, the group's report did not address Germany's stated objective of developing a means to facilitate comparing and assessing reported data in a user-friendly way, as it had explained in introducing the mandate for the group.

The General Assembly endorsed the report of the group in resolution [66/20](#) of 2 December 2011 and new paragraphs in the resolution operationalized its recommendations.<sup>70</sup> Despite the modifications to the reporting form and the new mandates aimed at promoting the use of the instrument, the rate of reoccurring participation declined over the early part of the 2010s. In particular, from 2011 onwards, the Secretariat was not able to continue its earlier practice, from the period 2002–2010, of convening regional workshops to increase awareness on the

---

<sup>70</sup> This included encouragement for "the Office for Disarmament Affairs of the Secretariat, with the financial and technical support of interested States, as appropriate, to continue to improve the existing database on military expenditures with a view to making it more user-friendly and up-to-date technologically and to increasing its functionality".



report among Member States, amid diminishing returns for such outreach and loss of support from donor countries.

In accordance with a recommendation of the group, the Assembly recommended that the instrument should be further reviewed on a periodic basis and for another review to be conducted in five years. It authorized such a further review in resolution [68/23](#) of 5 December 2013. The second group of governmental experts met in 2017.<sup>71</sup> Its primary concern was the declining rate of participation in the Report, especially by States with no reportable military expenditures that had only reported once. The group did not recommend any further modification of the reporting form. It recommended a number of steps be taken by the Office for Disarmament Affairs, including the upgrading of its electronic database to address existing challenges and ensure its continuous development and proper functioning. The group also called for the re-establishment of regional workshops, subject to the provision of adequate resources. The group deferred to the General Assembly on the matter of establishing a regular review process for the Report.

The General Assembly endorsed the report in resolution [72/20](#) of 4 December 2017. It made one small adjustment to the operative paragraph soliciting reports on military expenditures from Member States to include the possibility of submitting a report in a “single number” report. The operative paragraphs were otherwise unchanged from recent resolutions, except that it recommended that a regular review process for the report be considered at the seventy-fourth session.

---

<sup>71</sup> [A/72/293](#).

## Relationship between disarmament and development (1978–present)

### *First special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, 1978*

At the Preparatory Committee for the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden submitted a proposal for a study on the relationship between disarmament and development.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the proposal was to facilitate political decisions on the redeployment of resources from military use to economic and social development by clarifying the consequences of such redeployments on employment and production and how such reallocated resources could be most effectively utilized.<sup>2</sup>

The Preparatory Committee for the special session took up that proposal in its recommendations. Subsequently, the General Assembly, in resolution [32/88 A](#), endorsed the recommendation for the study, decided that the special session itself should decide on its terms of reference and requested the Secretary-General to appoint an ad hoc group of governmental experts with the task of elaborating a possible framework and terms of reference for the study. In accordance with that resolution, the

---

<sup>1</sup> [A/AC.187/80](#). Sweden introduced the proposal at the third session of the Preparatory Committee on 1 September 1977. See [A/AC.187/SR.16/Rev.1](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [A/AC.187/SR.16/Rev.1](#), paras. 2–12.

ad hoc group submitted its report prior to the special session in 1978.<sup>3</sup>

At its first special session devoted to disarmament, the General Assembly affirmed “a close relationship between disarmament and development. Progress in the former would help greatly in the realization of the latter. Therefore, resources released as a result of the implementation of disarmament measures should be devoted to the economic and social development of all nations and contribute to the bridging of the economic gap between developed and developing countries.”<sup>4</sup> Speaking at the special session, the President of France proposed the establishment of a disarmament fund for development, as a means for facilitating a link between disarmament and development.<sup>5</sup>

At the special session, the Assembly also carried forward the recommendations of the ad hoc group and requested the Secretary-General to establish a group of qualified governmental experts to initiate a study on the relationship between disarmament and development, taking its terms of reference from the ad hoc group’s report.<sup>6</sup> The “principal aim” of the study was to “produce results that could effectively guide the formulation of practical measures to reallocate those resources [now being used for military purposes] at the local, national, regional and international levels”.<sup>7</sup>

In accordance with the mandate agreed upon at the special session, the group submitted its interim report<sup>8</sup> to the General Assembly at its thirty-fourth session in 1979 and the final report<sup>9</sup> at the Assembly’s thirty-sixth session in 1981. In the final report, the group addressed the framework and scope

---

<sup>3</sup> A/S-10/9.

<sup>4</sup> A/S-10/4, para. 35.

<sup>5</sup> A/S-10/PV.3, pp. 42–44.

<sup>6</sup> A/S-10/4, para. 94.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., para. 95.

<sup>8</sup> A/34/534.

<sup>9</sup> A/36/356.

of the relationship between disarmament and development, the economic and social impacts of the arms race and of disarmament, the conversion and redeployment of resources from military purposes and possible institutional measures. The group agreed on nine recommendations, including on public reporting on the economic and social costs of military activities, national studies, reporting and preparations on conversion of resources from military use, the establishment of an international disarmament fund for development and inter-agency coordination with the Secretariat.

The General Assembly welcomed the report in resolution [36/92](#) G, adopted on 9 December 1981 without a vote. The Assembly also decided to transmit the report to the second special session devoted to disarmament for substantive consideration and appropriate action.

*Committee on Disarmament and the second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, 1980–1982*

During this period (1980–1982), the Committee on Disarmament sought to elaborate a comprehensive programme of disarmament, which included sections on the reduction of military expenditures, within the chapter on measures and stages of implementation,<sup>10</sup> as well as on disarmament and development.<sup>11</sup> The content of the draft programme followed directly from earlier work on these issues, including the 1981 report of the group of governmental experts on disarmament and development<sup>12</sup> and the proposals considered at the Disarmament Commission in its working group on the reduction of military budgets.

---

<sup>10</sup> The draft programme included chapters on the following: introduction or preamble; objectives; principles; priorities; measures and stages of implementation; and machinery and procedures.

<sup>11</sup> See [A/S-12/2](#).

<sup>12</sup> [A/36/356](#).

The Committee submitted a draft programme to the General Assembly at its the second special session devoted to disarmament. At the session, the Assembly was ultimately unable to reach agreement on the programme due to persistent divergences of opinion on various aspects, including on measures and stages of implementation.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, the Assembly recommended that items on which decisions could not be reached should be further considered at the next regular session. Accordingly, at its thirty-seventh session, in 1982, the General Assembly adopted resolution 37/84, entitled “Relationship between disarmament and development”, introduced by Sweden, in which it, *inter alia*, requested the Secretary-General to take appropriate administrative action in accordance with the recommendations of the 1981 study and recommended that the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research undertake a study on the modalities for an international disarmament fund for development.<sup>14</sup>

#### *United Nations Disarmament Commission, 1983*

In 1983, France and Sweden submitted separate texts under the agenda item “Relationship between disarmament and development”. The Swedish text, adopted as resolution 38/71 A, simply requested a further report by the Secretary-General on steps taken by Member States to implement resolution 37/84. The French text, adopted without a vote as resolution 38/71 B, sought proposals from Member States on various aspects of the topics<sup>15</sup> and for those responses to be considered by the

---

<sup>13</sup> These divergences specifically related to time frames and the review mechanism. See [A/S-12/32](#), para. 28.

<sup>14</sup> The General Assembly adopted the resolution by a vote of 136 to 3, with 10 abstentions. The abstainers were mostly from the Eastern bloc.

<sup>15</sup> In particular on (a) the evaluation of the burden of armaments in the world; (b) the impact of military expenditures on the world economic situation and development; (c) the contribution that a reduction in arms and military expenditures, in particular by nuclear-weapon States and other militarily significant States, or a contribution by those States, as appropriate, would make to development tasks; (d) the ways and

Disarmament Commission. The Commission established a working group on this item at its substantive session in 1984. The report of that working group largely summarized the various views expressed by delegations. In its conclusions, the Commission also expressed belief that “the world economy, and particularly that of developing countries, would benefit from appropriate international action that took into account the close relationship of disarmament and development”.<sup>16</sup> The Commission referred the matter back to the General Assembly to reach agreement.

*International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, 1984–1987*

Later in 1984, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution [39/160](#), introduced by France, in which it decided to convene an International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development for the following purposes: (a) reviewing the relationship between disarmament and development in all its aspects and dimensions with a view to reach appropriate conclusions; (b) examining the implications of the level and magnitude of the continuing military expenditures, in particular those of nuclear-weapon States and other militarily important States, for the world economy and international economic and social situation, particularly for the developing countries, and to make recommendations for remedial measures; and (c) considering ways and means of releasing additional resources, through disarmament measures, for development purposes, in particular in favour of developing countries.

---

means that would enable this contribution to be made, in particular in the interests of the economic and social progress of the developing countries; and (e) the consideration of proposals relating to the convening of a conference.

<sup>16</sup> [A/39/42](#), para. 27.

Also, in accordance with resolution [39/160](#), the Assembly established a preparatory committee for the international conference, comprised of 54 Member States, with a mandate to formulate consensus recommendations on the agenda, procedure, place, date and duration of the conference. On the basis of the recommendation made at the first session of the preparatory committee, the General Assembly initially decided, by resolution [40/155](#), which it adopted without a vote, to convene the conference in Paris in July 1986.

Also on the basis of a recommendation of the preparatory committee, the General Assembly endorsed the convening of a panel of eminent persons “in order to channel their input for the benefit of the Conference into the preparatory process”. The panel, which was chaired by Inga Thorsson, Former Under-Secretary of State of Sweden, met in 1986 and unanimously agreed on a Joint Declaration, which included recommended courses of action “to put an equal emphasis on recognizing the universality of the objectives of disarmament, development and security”.<sup>17</sup>

The United States did not participate in the subsequent sessions of the preparatory committee, nor in the conference.<sup>18</sup> The preparatory committee undertook substantive preparations at its second and third sessions,<sup>19</sup> including on elements that could be included in an outcome document. Between these sessions, France concluded that the positions of the participating States were still far apart, and it therefore requested a postponement of the conference until 1987.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> *Disarmament and Development: Joint Declaration by the Panel of Eminent Experts in the Field of Disarmament and Development* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.86.IX.5).

<sup>18</sup> See *The United Nations Disarmament Yearbook*, vol. 12 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.88.IX.2), p. 342.

<sup>19</sup> Held from 1 to 11 April 1986 and 2 to 13 June 1986 respectively.

<sup>20</sup> A fourth session of the Preparatory Committee was held from 21 April to 1 May 1987, in accordance with General Assembly decision [41/422](#).

The International Conference was ultimately held in New York from 24 August to 11 September 1987.<sup>21</sup> It concluded with the adoption of a final document, which included an action programme.<sup>22</sup> Reactions to the outcome were mixed and subdued. Those who most strongly welcomed the outcome pointed to the fact that it signified the first recognition of the relationship between disarmament and development at intergovernmental levels. Some nonetheless regretted that the outcome did not establish any mechanisms for follow up or implementation. Others, especially from Western States, regretted various aspects of the outcome, including any notion of an automatic or mechanical link between disarmament and development or any effort to predetermine how development assistance should be allocated.

*High-level intra-secretariat task force on disarmament and development, 1989–1992*

The General Assembly followed up on the outcome of the Conference in resolution 42/45, in which it requested the Secretary-General to take action through appropriate organs and within available resources for the implementation of the action programme.<sup>23</sup> The relevant part of the action programme emphasized the need to strengthen the central role of the United Nations and its appropriate organs in the field of disarmament and development, in promoting an interrelated perspective of these issues within the overall objective of promoting international peace and security.

In addition to various measures addressed to the United Nations in general, this section specifically requested the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts to foster and

---

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed overview of the Conference and its Preparatory Committee see *The United Nations Disarmament Yearbook*, vol. 12, chap. XVIII, pp. 339–378.

<sup>22</sup> [A/CONF.130/39](#).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 35 (ix).



coordinate the incorporation of the disarmament-development perspective in the activities of the United Nations. It also notably called upon the United Nations to promote collective knowledge of the non-military threats to international security, establish an improved comprehensive database on global and national military expenditures, analyse the impact of global military expenditures on the world economy and the international economic system and monitor trends in military spending, and facilitate the exchange of experience in the field of conversion from military to civilian production.

The General Assembly had referred to the report to the third special session devoted to disarmament. However, the third special session, which convened from 31 May to 20 June 1988, ultimately failed to agree on a substantive outcome document. Accordingly, in its resolution on the relationship between disarmament and development adopted at the forty-third session (43/75 B), the General Assembly reiterated the request contained in resolution 42/45. It was also notable that, from the forty-third session onwards, the annual resolutions on the relationship between disarmament and development have been introduced by the Non-Aligned Movement.

Pursuant to those two resolutions, the Secretary-General established a high-level intra-secretariat task force, convened by the Under-Secretary-General of the Department for Disarmament Affairs.<sup>24</sup> For the period 1988 to 1990, the priority areas for specific activities were the following: (a) monitoring trends in military spending; (b) facilitating exchanges in experience in conversion from military to civilian production; and (c) promoting collective knowledge of non-

---

<sup>24</sup> The other members of the task force included the following: Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation, who chaired the task force; Under-Secretary-General of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs; and Assistant Secretary-General of the Office for Research and the Collection of Information.

military threats to international security.<sup>25</sup> In 1991, the task force added activities on the impact of arms reductions on the world economy and on developing a publicity and information strategy within the United Nations. It also indicated that the Department for Disarmament Affairs would continue its work on the establishment of a mechanism for monitoring trends in military and that the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs would continue its work on establishing a benchmark study of economic indicators of military spending.<sup>26</sup>

\* \* \*

The end of the cold war marked a major shift within the United Nations in the area of disarmament, including in terms of the status of long-standing processes. As noted above, the General Assembly has not pursued a stand-alone agreement on the reduction of military budgets since 1989, despite perennial concern since the turn of the century over growing military spending worldwide, which now exceeds cold-war levels in real terms. Some of this de-prioritization reflected a belief that the end of the cold war would bring about an automatic solution to the issue of disarmament—without any special efforts, the easing of international tensions was expected to lead directly to easing the military burden worldwide and the main problem to be solved would be demobilizing and reintegrating resources devoted to military use.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> See [A/44/449](#) and [A/45/592](#). The work on monitoring trends, pursued jointly by the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs and the Department for Disarmament Affairs, involved the preparation of indicators for the measurement of the military burden of military spending, developed for the purpose of creating a theoretical framework for assessing the economic impact of military expenditures and arms reductions.

<sup>26</sup> [A/46/527](#).

<sup>27</sup> For instance, in his 1992 report “New Dimensions of Arms Regulation and Disarmament in the Post-Cold War Era”, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali began his conclusion by saying:

“With the development of the process of disarmament we are encountering an entirely new set of problems, which may be labelled

The sense of optimism that pervaded at the end of the cold war seemed to have negative consequences for the ability of the Secretariat to support previously mandated tasks. The reorganization and streamlining of the Secretariat in 1992 resulted in incorporation of the Disarmament for Disarmament Affairs and the Office for Research and the Collection of Information into the new Department for Political Affairs.<sup>28</sup> This restructuring had a direct impact on the composition and work of the task force on disarmament and development, as two of three members ceased to exist. Unsurprisingly, in the following years, the Secretariat largely ceased to exercise leadership or new activities in implementing the outcome of the 1987 conference and work to carry out these mandates eventually came to a halt amid an apparent lack of interest from Member States.

Accordingly, work on the relationship between disarmament and development in the immediate post-cold war era tended to focus on conversion, in the expectation that disarmament agreements would be implemented, provided

---

'post-disarmament issues'. The correlation between disarmament measures and economic conditions has drawn more attention over recent years as democratic trends influence development. This emerging issue highlights the immediate need for post-disarmament efforts as economies and Governments try to transform military-oriented industrial complexes into enterprises serving social, humanitarian and development needs. Three problems stand out in urgency and complexity: the safe destruction and storage of armaments resulting from disarmament agreements; conversion of military capacities to peaceful uses; and adequate technical and financial facilities to make this transition in a balanced manner." (A/C.1/47/7, para. 38)

See also the report of the group of governmental experts on disarmament and development, A/59/119, para 6.

<sup>28</sup> See A/46/882 and A/47/452. Between 1992 and 1994, the Office for Disarmament Affairs within the Department of Political Affairs was headed by a Director at D-1 level.

States took the necessary actions.<sup>29</sup> In 1990, the General Assembly authorized an expert group study on charting potential uses of resources allocated to military activities for civilian endeavours to protect the environment.<sup>30</sup> The shift to a focus on conversion was also reflected in the work of the Secretariat.<sup>31</sup> The main activities reported by the Secretariat in this period involved conferences co-organized by the Department of Economic and Social Development on conversion, held in Moscow<sup>32</sup> in 1992 and in Hong Kong<sup>33</sup> in 1993.

The report of the Secretary-General in 1994 did not include an account of any further activities. It rather included some concluding observations: “In the light of the changed international situation and the lessons learned through national

---

<sup>29</sup> The 1992 *New Dimensions* report did acknowledge the possibility that disarmament would require attention by States, noting: “The arms industry and the military establishment, which usually enjoy considerable privileges, will resist changes. Unless States take decisive actions in changing this situation, disarmament will be a slower and more painful process.” (A/C.1/47/7, para. 39)

<sup>30</sup> The report prepared pursuant resolution 45/58 N can be found in document A/46/364. In this foreword to the report, the Secretary-General opens with the words: “Ours in an era of opportunities. Vast political energies have been released by the end of the cold war. New possibilities have been opened for a more productive utilization of the world’s resources. Several major areas of international concern can now benefit from a redirection, reorientation and redeployment of resources released through an unprecedented process in actual reductions of armaments and armed forces.” Unfortunately for the authors of the study, nearly three decades later such reductions remain unprecedented.

<sup>31</sup> See A/47/452 and A/48/400.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Conference on Conversion of the Aerospace Complex, organized by the Science, Technology, Environment and Resources Division of the Department of Economic and Social Development together with the Government of the Russian Federation (see A/48/400).

<sup>33</sup> Conference on International Cooperation to Promote Conversion from Military to Civilian Industry was organized by the China Association for Peaceful Use of Military and Industrial Technology and the Office of Legal Advisory Services for Development in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development, in Hong Kong, from 7 to 10 July 1993 (see A/48/400).

attempts at dealing with military and economic adjustments in the post-cold-war era, a critical review of the whole issue is needed before further action in the field can be promoted.” It was also specified that further reports on the subject by the Secretary-General would, therefore, depend on a relevant evaluation of the programme by Member States and the conclusions they reached in that respect, including any specific requests addressed to the Secretary-General.<sup>34</sup> In the resolution on this item adopted by the General Assembly later that year (49/75 J), the Assembly continued to “welcome” the report of the Secretary-General and did not include any modification to the prior mandate.

The brief note by the Secretary-General in 1995 reiterated these conclusions and stated that, “pending further guidance by the Member States, the Secretary-General has no new developments to report at this stage”.<sup>35</sup> In 1996, the Secretary-General reported simply that the situation remained unchanged.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, later that year at the fifty-first session, the sponsors of the annual resolution introduced a new operative paragraph inviting all Member States to communicate to the Secretary-General their views and proposals for the implementation of the action programme adopted at the 1987 conference, as well as any other views and proposals with a view to achieving the goals of the action programme, within the framework of current international relations.<sup>37</sup> The General Assembly reiterated its request above for views on an annual

---

<sup>34</sup> [A/49/476](#).

<sup>35</sup> [A/50/388](#).

<sup>36</sup> [A/51/207](#).

<sup>37</sup> General Assembly resolution [51/45 D](#).

basis between 1997 and 2001.<sup>38</sup> Despite these requests, no communication was received by the Secretary-General.<sup>39</sup>

*Revival and the High-level Steering Group on Disarmament and Development, 1997–2004*

In 1998, the United Nations Secretariat initiated efforts to revive the implementation of the action programme of the 1987 conference. These efforts were enabled by the restructuring of the political and economic structures of the Secretariat announced in 1997, which included the restoration of the Department for Disarmament Affairs.<sup>40</sup> In 1999, the Secretary-General established the high-level Steering Group on Disarmament and Development, which included the Under-Secretary-General for the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the Under-Secretary-General for the Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme. The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations later joined at the invitation of the Steering Group. The Department for Disarmament Affairs coordinated and provided substantive servicing for the Steering Group.

At its inaugural meeting in May 1999, the Steering Group oriented its discussion around the various changes in the international situation since the 1987 conference, including the end of the cold war, and the growing need to address the impacts of civil conflicts, the destabilizing effects of the spread of small arms and the continuing challenges relating to the conversion

---

<sup>38</sup> Resolutions [52/38 D](#) of 9 December 1997, [53/77 K](#) of 4 December 1998, [54/54 T](#) of 1 December 1999, [55/33 L](#) of 20 November 2000, and [56/24 E](#) of 29 November 2001. Resolution [50/70 G](#) added an operative paragraph “urging the international community to devote part of the resources made available by the implementation of disarmament and arms limitation agreements to economic and social development, with a view to reducing the ever-widening gap between developed and developing countries”.

<sup>39</sup> [A/53/206](#), paras. 3 and 4.

<sup>40</sup> [ST/SGB/1997/5](#). See [A/53/206](#), para. 9.

of military facilities to productive civilian use.<sup>41</sup> The Steering Group identified a number of programmes and activities to be undertaken by the Secretariat, including the development of statistical information and analytical material by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on military expenditures, the arms trade and conversion, and the organization of regular symposiums, panels and workshops.<sup>42</sup>

The most significant activity carried out under the auspices of the Steering Group was a symposium co-organized with the non-governmental organization Economists Allied for Arms Reductions held at United Nations Headquarters on 20 July 1999. During the symposium, chaired by Lawrence R. Klein, a Nobel laureate in economics, the following topics were discussed: military spending; small arms proliferation; civil and inter-State conflict; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; post-conflict peacebuilding; the peace dividend; and development assistance. In 1999, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs also convened an ad hoc expert group on patterns and trends in public expenditures, which included two presentations on the current level of military expenditures and the cost effectiveness of providing defence as a public good, one in Latin America and the other in States members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and of the former Warsaw Treaty Organization.<sup>43</sup> In 2000, the Under-Secretaries-General for economic and social affairs and for disarmament affairs co-authored an op-ed in the *International Herald Tribune* on the relationship between reducing military spending and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> [A/54/254](#), para. 6.

<sup>42</sup> See [A/54/254](#), paras. 11–12; [A/55/258](#), para. 9; [A/56/183](#), para. 4 and 9; [A/57/167](#), para. 2.

<sup>43</sup> [A/55/258](#), para. 6. (Note: The symbol published in [A/55/258](#) is incorrect. The correct symbol for the publication “Trends and issues in the analysis of public expenditures” is ST/ESA/PAD/W.3.)

<sup>44</sup> Nitin Desai and Jayantha Dhanapala, “[A Peace Dividend for Developing Countries Would Pay Off](#)”, *International Herald Tribune*, 22 December 2000.

Later that year, at its fifty-fifth session, the General Assembly recognized these efforts, welcoming the various activities of the Steering Group and calling upon it to strengthen and enhance its programme.<sup>45</sup> However, by 2002 financial constraints began to restrict the scope of activities that could be undertaken by the Secretariat and very few States had responded to the repeated requests to communicate their views and proposals. Therefore, the Secretary-General proposed that Member States consider the establishment of a group of governmental experts to undertake a reappraisal of the relationship between disarmament and development in the current international context, as well as the future role of the Organization in this connection.<sup>46</sup> The General Assembly took up this proposal in resolution [57/65](#) and requested the Secretary-General to establish a group of governmental experts in 2003 to undertake such a reappraisal.

The group of governmental experts on disarmament and development held three sessions between 2003 and 2004 and produced a consensus report, including recommendations. In its report, the group addressed the changes in the international security context since the 1987 conference and observed the largely unrealized expectations that the end of the cold war would mean that “the work of disarmament was taking care of itself and that development opportunities for all would inevitably follow. This reduced the political will or sense of urgency with regard to the implementation of the recommendations contained in the 1987 action programme.”<sup>47</sup> The group’s discussion on the disarmament-development relationship, the costs and consequences of military expenditures and conversion generally followed along the same lines of earlier studies and the output of the 1987 conference. In its recommendations, the group

---

<sup>45</sup> General Assembly resolution [55/33](#). The General Assembly repeated this call in subsequent resolutions (see General Assembly resolution [56/24](#) and [57/65](#)).

<sup>46</sup> [A/57/167](#).

<sup>47</sup> [A/59/119](#), para. 6.



supported, inter alia, the following: greater adherence to the United Nations transparency instruments; further strengthening of the high-level Steering Group; greater integration of disarmament, humanitarian and development activities within the United Nations system; and a greater focus on combating the illicit arms trade.

As with earlier studies, there were signs of political influence in the report. This is most notable in the section on conversion, which, despite observing that numerous factors affect political and policy choices governing military expenditures at the national level, subsequently attributes a State's motives to acquire arms solely to its external security concerns. This is despite contemporary empirical research that found that "dramatic change in the global strategic environment" following from the end of the cold war had no significant impact on demand for military spending in developing countries.<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that the expert group was exclusively composed of diplomats and foreign ministry officials, marking a significant departure from previous United Nations studies, which normally included a number of economists and other academics.

*End of the Steering Group and contemporary efforts,  
2004–present*

The General Assembly welcomed the report of the group of governmental experts in resolution 59/78. The operative part of the resolution was also updated, in line with the conclusions of the report, to stress the central role of the United Nations in the disarmament-development relationship and to request the Secretary-General to strengthen further the high-level Steering Group. It also included new paragraphs supporting the Millennium Development Goals and encouraging all relevant entities to incorporate the issue into their agendas. Starting with

---

<sup>48</sup> See J. Paul Dunne and Sam Perlo Freeman, "The demand for military spending in developing countries: a dynamic panel analysis", *Defence and Peace Economics*, 2003, vol. 14(6), December, pp. 461–474.

resolution 62/48, the General Assembly has annually invited Member States to provide the Secretary-General with information regarding measures and efforts to devote part of the resources made available by the implementation of disarmament and arms limitation agreements to economic and social development; very few States typically provide responses. In resolution 72/46, the reference to the Millennium Development Goals was updated to the Sustainable Development Goals. Other aspects of the operative part of the resolution have remained unchanged.

The Steering Group also welcomed the report of the group, took steps to implement its recommendations, including by designating focal points at the working level, and was in the process of examining how the issues related to disarmament and development could be better integrated into the activities of appropriate components of the United Nations system. The Steering Group activities that fell under the rubric of disarmament and development would continue to be carried out by various components of the United Nations system as part of their respective policies and programmes. It also noted that the implementation of many such activities would depend on the availability of resources and access to extrabudgetary support.<sup>49</sup> In accordance with the resolutions of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General continued to report until 2007 on the activities undertaken by departments and agencies that were partners of the Steering Group.<sup>50</sup>

From 2008 onwards, the reports of the Secretary-General ceased to refer to the Steering Group and began to include information on a broader range of disarmament matters, such as developments in international humanitarian law relevant to arms control and arms transparency.<sup>51</sup> The 2008 report included information on activities undertaken by the United Nations related to the recommendations of the report of the Group of

---

<sup>49</sup> A/60/94.

<sup>50</sup> See A/61/98 and A/62/112.

<sup>51</sup> A/63/134.

Governmental Experts on the relationship between disarmament and development. The 2008 report also declared that the Secretariat was not mandated to monitor and analyse the trends in military expenditures nor their impact on the world economy and international security. This statement curiously contrasts with earlier reports by the Secretary-General on this same item, which reported on the efforts undertaken by the high-level intra-secretariat task force and called for continued action by the Secretary-General in this connection.<sup>52</sup>

Since 2009, the reports of the Secretary-General have described the mechanism for coordinating issues of disarmament and development as including the Mine Action Team, the Coordinating Action on Small Arms and the Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration. In general, these reports have not included any information on the activities of the Secretariat, but rather describe developments relating to processes inside and outside the United Nations in the area of conventional arms control, including, inter alia, the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Arms Trade Treaty, the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> See section above and [A/45/592](#) and [A/46/527](#). Those reports “and actions undertaken in accordance with the Final Document of the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development” were welcomed in resolutions adopted by the General Assembly under that item ([45/58 A](#) and [46/36 C](#)). Those resolutions also requested the Secretary-General to continue to take action, through the appropriate organs and with available resources, for the implementation of the action programme adopted at the 1987 conference.

<sup>53</sup> [A/64/153](#), [A/65/132](#), [A/66/168](#), [A/67/186](#), [A/68/119](#), [A/69/152](#), [A/70/163](#), [A/71/152](#), [A/72/308](#) and [A/73/117](#).

## Disarmament and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In September 2000, heads of United Nations Member States adopted the Millennium Declaration, which included sections on values and principles; peace, security and disarmament; development and poverty eradication; protecting our common environment; human rights, democracy and good governance; protecting the vulnerable; meeting the special needs of Africa; and strengthening the United Nations.<sup>1</sup> The time-bound targets related to development and the eradication of extreme poverty became the eight Millennium Development Goals, with a target completion date of 2015.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the framework of the Goals was limited to addressing only one aspect of the Millennium Declaration has been an object of criticism, not the least because it deprived the international community with an opportunity to address the interconnections between the issues.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The eight goals were the following: (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (2) achieve universal primary education; (3) promote gender equality and empower women; (4) reduce child mortality; (5) improve maternal health; (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; (7) ensure environmental development; and (8) global partnership for development.

<sup>3</sup> For a general survey of critical commentary on the Millennium Development Goals published in the academic literature, see Maya Fehling, Brett D. Nelson and Sridhar Venkatapuram (2013), "[Limitations](#)

In September 2015, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which included 17 goals, with specific targets and indicators to be reached within 15 years. The Sustainable Development Goals included one target directly related to arms control.<sup>4</sup> Goal 16, to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies, includes a target, 16.4, to significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows by 2030. The relevant indicator, 16.4.2, reads as follows: “Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments”.

The paucity of links to disarmament within the Agenda undoubtedly contributed to the relative slowness of efforts by the disarmament community to engage fully with the Sustainable Development Goals. The initial efforts by the Office for Disarmament Affairs, which was designated co-custodian of indicator 16.4.2 together with the Office on Drugs and Crime, focused on that target and on the methods and means of collecting data. The two offices jointly presented information on their coordination in reporting, data collection and monitoring for Indicator 16.4.2 to the 2018 Review Conference of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons.<sup>5</sup> Collection of data will primarily take place within the framework of the Firearms Protocol<sup>6</sup> and will be supplemented

---

of the Millennium Development Goals: a literature review”, *Global Public Health*, 8:10, 1109–1122.

<sup>4</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015. The 2015 edition of the *Disarmament Yearbook* puzzlingly states that this marked “the first time the sustainable development agenda and disarmament have been directly linked” (vol. 40, part II, p. 177).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime/United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, joint [non-paper on Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 16.4.2](#).

<sup>6</sup> Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.

with data collected within the framework of the Programme of Action.

Arms also have a direct bearing on the measurement of Target 16.1 on significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Indicator 16.1.2 requires collection of data on the number of conflict-related deaths per 100,000 people, by sex, age and cause. In consultation with the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the technical guidance on measuring the “cause of death” produced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights incorporates categories and definitions drawn from the Register of Conventional Arms and other United Nations instruments on disarmament and arms control.

On 24 May 2018, Secretary-General António Guterres released his Agenda for Disarmament, entitled *Securing Our Common Future*. In the Agenda, he observes that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development took an important step towards articulating how arms control, peace and security contribute to development. Beyond addressing illicit arms flows, there remains a vast potential to operationally link the implementation of disarmament objectives with many other Sustainable Development Goals, in order to bring the historical relationship between disarmament and development back to the forefront of international consciousness.

In that connection, the Agenda for Disarmament maps where disarmament objectives, processes and activities are operationally linked with specific goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Activities related to the Sustainable Development Goals to be undertaken by entities within the United Nations system and beyond are integrated throughout the implementation plan of the Agenda for Disarmament.<sup>7</sup> These address Goal 3 (Good health and

---

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.un.org/disarmament/sg-agenda/en/>.

well-being),<sup>8</sup> Goal 4 (Quality education),<sup>9</sup> Goal 5 (Gender equality),<sup>10</sup> Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth),<sup>11</sup> Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities)<sup>12</sup> and Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions).<sup>13</sup> These activities were developed on the basis of an international action developed within the Office for Disarmament Affairs earlier in 2018.

This Occasional Paper was prepared pursuant to the implementation plan for Goal 8, which seeks to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, as well as full and productive employment and decent work for all. Target 8.1 in particular provides for sustained per-capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances. This paper is thus intended to serve as a first step towards supporting renewed

---

<sup>8</sup> **Target 3.d:** Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks.

<sup>9</sup> **Target 4.7:** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

<sup>10</sup> **Target 5.2:** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; and **Target 5.5:** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

<sup>11</sup> **Target 8.1:** Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries.

<sup>12</sup> **Target 11.5:** By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations.

<sup>13</sup> **Target 16.1:** Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere; **Target 16.4:** By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime; and **Target 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.

research on the relationship between military spending and economic and social development with a view to developing evidence-based policy recommendations in the context of Goal 8.



## Conclusions and recommendations

The need to devote specific attention to the problems of excessive military expenditures did not disappear with the end of the cold war. Despite the end of the arms race, global military spending in constant figures currently exceeds the levels reached in the late 1980s, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.<sup>1</sup> The ranks of the top spenders have expanded beyond the former cold war blocs and now includes advanced developing countries in Asia. In 2018, the top six spenders were, in descending order: United States, China, Saudi Arabia, India, France and the Russian Federation. Increases in military spending continue to be a source of international tension, especially among significant military Powers and in various regions where trust and security cooperation are already low. The lack of cooperation and dialogue on military spending also deprives States with a means of fulfilling the Charter's objective of maintaining peace and security with the least diversion of economic resources.

- **Recommendation:** In light of these trends, the reduction of military budgets should be revived as a distinct disarmament concern and as an integral component of the disarmament toolkit. As initial steps, this should include the following: updating international understanding on the economic, environmental social and political consequences

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Nan Tian, et al, “[Fact Sheet: Trends in world military expenditure, 2018](#)”, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, , April 2019.

of excessive military spending; re-examining possible means of ensuring resources released through disarmament measures are devoted to development, climate change and other socially productive purposes; improving accessibility and comparability of official data; and re-establishing collaboration on practical common objectives within the Secretariat.

As the many studies on these matters carried out between 1960 and 1988 made clear, the relationship between military spending and national economies is more complicated than the reductionist mantra of guns versus butter. Since the end of the cold war, there has not been any serious or sustained work within the United Nations on the relationship between military spending and on economic indicators for growth and sustainability. Consequently, within the United Nations, there is little understanding of how military spending, whether measured as a state's military expenditure as a share of its gross domestic product (known as the military burden) or as a share of total government expenditures, impacts the achievement of development objectives—for instance, by contributing to undesired inflation, by competing with other domestic spending objectives, by reducing consumer spending as a consequence of higher taxation or by other mechanisms that have yet to be fully examined. There have been no efforts within the United Nations to understand the relationship between excessive military spending and climate change. Despite this paucity of current research, it still stands to reason that the achievement of many priority objectives, from sustainable development to climate change, could be more easily reached if resources currently dedicated to military purposes could be specifically allocated to socially productive purposes.

The privatization of military production and in many parts of the world merits particular attention. The political power of private and commercial interests in influencing national policies priorities, possibly to the detriment of disarmament objectives or a disinterested and rational analysis of national security

requirements, has not been studied by the United Nations. While possibly difficult to address for an international organization founded on the principle of sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs, understanding such dynamics may provide vital information on prospects for the success, failure and sustainability of disarmament measures at all phases, from design to implementation.

Relatedly, any effort to build a contemporary understanding of the impact of military spending would need to address the integration of military production into civilian economies, especially in the area of science and technology. It is now widely recognized that innovation in military technology is no longer the sole product of dedicated government investment, but often originates within the civilian sector. Updated study on the impact of excessive military spending on the research and development capacity of States should go beyond quantifying the so-called brain drain and seek to understand the complex economic, social and political relationships between military production and the scientific and technical community.

- **Recommendation:** An updated study and research programme on the economic, social and political consequences of military expenditures and of the arms trade should be sought, taking into account trends and developments since the end of the cold war.

There is a need to reach a new common understanding on the relationship between disarmament and development. As this historical survey makes clear, this relationship was originally conceived as a deliberate process of devoting resources released as a consequence of disarmament agreements to development purposes. The initial studies on this topic did not regard this as an automatic process but rather something to be accomplished through an agreed mechanism, ideally without prejudice to pre-existing commitments of States to allocate resources for development assistance. This can be accomplished through a stand-alone agreement, building upon the work of the

Disarmament Commission to develop guidelines towards this end between 1979 and 1989, or it can be accomplished through the implementation of disarmament agreements.

- **Recommendation:** Further work at the inter-agency level, expert groups or intergovernmental bodies should elaborate principles and guidelines for mechanisms to devote resources released as a consequence of disarmament to development purposes. Such work can examine, *inter alia*, the establishment of a dedicated fund and principles for incorporating such a mechanism into future disarmament agreements or a stand-alone agreement.

There are steps that the Office for Disarmament Affairs should continue to undertake to improve the accessibility of official data on military spending. This includes improving the functionality of its online database, modernizing the user interface, enabling users to select and download aggregated or disaggregated data and providing a basis for figures to be compared. To facilitate comparison of official and unofficial data, the Office for Disarmament Affairs can consider making use of calculation methods that have been employed by the most common cited source for figures on global military spending—namely, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. For its military expenditure database, the Institute uses the consumer price index of the country concerned as the deflator for converting from current to constant prices and it generally uses average market exchange rates for the given year to convert local currency figures into United States dollars.

- **Recommendation:** The Office for Disarmament Affairs should continue to improve the accessibility and comparability of official data on military spending submitted pursuant to the United Nations Report on Military Expenditures.

Intra-secretariat collaboration has served several important roles at times in the past to complement intergovernmental processes, including during times of heightened international

tensions. This was most sustainable when it was focused on concrete objectives and the provision of direct services to other parts of the Organization and to Member States. At present, the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, including its integration of disarmament and the Sustainable Development Goals, provides a strong basis for collaboration on the relationship between disarmament and development.

- **Recommendation:** High-level inter-agency coordination could be re-established around specific strategic objectives, such as the pursuit of country-level approaches on small arms and light weapons (Agenda for Disarmament Action 20) and on the integration of gender perspectives into analysis on the impact of arms (Sustainable Development Goal 5.5).
- **Recommendation:** Working-level coordination could be re-established on other practical objectives, including on providing analytical support within the Secretariat on trends and developments in military spending, as well as on the revival of efforts to develop economic indicators related to military spending.

SEMINARS STATEMENTS SYMPOSIA WORKSHOPS  
SHOPS MEETINGS PRESENTATIONS PAPERS SEM  
S SEMINARS STATEMENTS SYMPOSIA WORKSHO  
SHOPS MEETINGS PRESENTATIONS PAPERS SEM  
SEMINARS STATEMENTS SYMPOSIA WORKSHO  
SHOPS MEETINGS PRESENTATIONS PAPERS SEM

SHOPS MEETINGS PRESENTATIONS PAPERS SEM  
S SEMINARS STATEMENTS SYMPOSIA WORKSHO  
SHOPS MEETINGS PRESENTATIONS PAPERS SEM  
S SEMINARS STATEMENTS SYMPOSIA WORKSHO  
SHOPS MEETINGS PRESENTATIONS PAPERS SEM  
S SEMINARS STATEMENTS SYM POSIA WORKSHO  
SHOPS MEETINGS PRESENTAT RS SEM  
S SEMINARS STATEMENTS SYM POSIA WORKSHO  
SHOPS MEETINGS PRESENTATIONS PAPERS SEM

ISBN 978-92-1-139175-6



9 789211 391756