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Transparency in the arms industry

Abstract for submission

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While transparency in the government military sector has been on the political agenda since the 1970s and has resulted in, for example, requests for reporting by governments—albeit voluntary—of military expenditure and arms transfers, no similar reporting demands have been directed towards the arms industry. Company reporting of the military share of their sales is rare and incomplete and the reporting of the military share of their exports and research and development is almost non-existent.

The majority of initiatives in the area of corporate transparency have focused either on the broad issue of regulating transnational corporations (TNCs) or on the very narrow issue of combating corruption in the arms industry. Often overlooked is the basic stumbling block to any kind of research in this area—the lack of publicly available information on company arms sales. This paper confines itself to a very narrow and particular aspect of ‘transparency’: the extent to which companies world-wide fully and accurately describe their involvement in the ‘military’, ‘arms’ or ‘defence’ industries.