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Concluding Remarks by the Acting Chairman
Military Expenditure and the Role of the Fund
Executive Board Meeting 91/138
October 2, 1991

During the discussions on the World Economic Outlook, Directors touched on the issue of military spending in the context of the need to raise global savings and to help meet new investment demands. The scale of global resources devoted to military spending--estimated at nearly 5 percent of world GDP--underscores its importance. In the more recent discussion on Military Expenditure and the Role of the Fund, most Directors indicated that as military expenditures can have an important bearing on a member's fiscal policy and external position, information about such expenditures may be necessary to permit a full and internally consistent assessment of the member's economic position and policies. At the same time, Directors emphasized that national security, and judgments regarding the appropriate level of military expenditures required to assure that security, were a sovereign prerogative of national governments and were not in the domain of the work of the Fund.

While many Directors saw a limited, albeit important, role for the Fund in the collection and analysis of data on military spending, a number questioned the role of the Fund in this area. Since the collection of data from all members in the context of Article IV consultations requires the cooperation of members, Directors felt it important, in light of the diverse views expressed during this meeting, to find a common ground that commands a wide degree of support. This common ground should be based on the Fund's mandate in the Articles.

In the context of the Fund's surveillance responsibilities, the staff needs to request of members certain data to provide the analytic basis for an effective assessment of members' macroeconomic policies. At a minimum and for all members, aggregate data which include fiscal expenditures (including off-budget accounts), international trade, and external assets and liabilities, must be reported fully to the Fund. These data should therefore encompass military transactions, even if not separately identified. It has been the policy and practice of the Fund staff to seek comprehensive macroeconomic data for this purpose. In those instances when inconsistencies in data suggested significant reporting gaps, Fund staff has informed the Board and supplemented data from the authorities to the extent possible with data from other sources. Most Directors agreed that the Fund staff should enhance its work to improve the comprehensiveness, comparability, and timeliness of such data reported by authorities.

As military spending is a highly sensitive area, however, several Directors expressed concern about the degree of data disaggregation that might be requested by the staff. In the past, the staff has generally requested, or been offered by authorities of member countries, more detailed information on the breakdown of government expenditures, either on a national or fiscal accounts basis, which have been part of the documentation in staff reports. Such disaggregation, say, as between consumption and capital items, may be necessary in order fully to assess growth prospects and external viability. The staff will continue to request a breakdown of government expenditures, but still at a highly aggregated level, in the context of the Article IV consultation process in order to assess the consistency and sustainability of a member's policies. The staff will continue to rely on the voluntary cooperation of the authorities in the submission of data. Data deficiencies, which were thought to impair the ability to assess a member's economic position and prospects and to conduct meaningful policy discussions, would be brought to the attention of the Board in the manner in which such data deficiencies are normally so reported. Directors agreed that data on military expenditures should not serve as a basis for establishing performance criteria or similar conditions associated with Fund-supported programs.

Countries, when contemplating downsizing their military establishments, may wish to be assisted by the staff in assessing the possible effects of such downsizing on macroeconomic performance. In such cases, the authorities may wish to provide such data as would permit more detailed economic analysis and facilitate economic policy discussions. The Fund staff would work closely with Bank staff in these cases on the structural issues associated with shifting domestic resources to other uses.

The macroeconomic effects of military spending could also be analyzed from a regional and global perspective in the WEO.