

NISAT database user manual

Introduction

The NISAT database project collects information on transfers of small arms and light weapons from a variety of sources and compiles them in this database. The database does not provide a definitive value for states' exports and imports.

The database therefore provides the user with an opportunity to access information from a wide variety of open data sources. Users should take note that:

- in many cases the NISAT database may contain more than one reference to the same transfer (from different sources); and
- transfers taking place in many parts of the world may well remain unreported. Absence of information should not be regarded as evidence that transfers have not taken place.

Even though the majority of the information comes from official government sources, in many cases it is incomplete and only offers a partial snapshot of the global trade in small arms and light weapons. Users should bear this in mind when discovering that imports do not always correlate with exports (or vice versa).

Furthermore, users should be aware that customs data (Comtrade and national customs) merely reports the flow of small arms across borders. Transfers reported by customs sources may not record the final country of destination. Furthermore, some transfers may concern the temporary movement of small arms (such as for repair) rather than definitive exports (or imports).

Please note that the researcher's database is accessible only via a password. This part of the database contains more detailed information and may contain copyright protected data that can only be distributed to a limited set of scholarly users. If you wish to access the researcher's database please send a mail with your details to [Rune Slettebak](#), who is responsible for the NISAT database project.

Querying the database

It is very important to use the correct selection order for the first four steps (1,2,3,4).

More information about the steps is displayed below (click on the headings for more information).

1. [Reverse querying](#)
2. [Select country or region 1](#)
3. [Imports from or exports to](#)
4. [Select country or region 2](#)

[Select PRIO arms classification](#)

[Select level of detail](#) (Researcher's database only)

[Select data source](#) (Researcher's database only)

[Select start year](#)

[Select end year](#)

[Select vendor type](#)

[Select data scope](#)

[Display all values in US dollars](#)

[Export data in CSV format](#) (Researcher's database only)

Once the categories have been selected the 'go' button will become active. You should press it to search the database.

You may have to wait a few minutes for very large searches to be processed. Your browser may 'time out' if the search takes too long. In this case please search again using more limited parameters.

For example, a search of all US exports over the period 1962-2002 will produce an excessively large dataset. You are advised to split up the search (perhaps by looking at data for only ten years at a time).

Interpreting the results

The database presents information in the following categories (click on them for more information):

[Weapon type](#)

[Units](#)

[Value](#)

[Licenses issued](#)

[Weight](#)

[Licenses refused](#)

[Authorisations or Deliveries](#)

[Data sources](#)

[Government or industrial sale](#)

[Accuracy](#)

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Reverse querying

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This is a very powerful facility that instructs the database to automatically search the 'mirror' of a particular transaction. A search for a particular country's exports will also check all other countries' declarations of their imports. Similarly, a search for a country's imports will also reveal exports to it by all other countries.

In this way a more complete dataset can be generated. For example, the German Democratic Republic (DDR) did not release any information about its SALW exports. However, it is possible to build up a partial picture of the DDR's exports as a reverse queried search will produce a table of all countries that have declared imports from the DDR.

Please take note that reverse querying can generate very large datasets. Therefore it is wise to limit other parameters (such as the start and end date).

Select country 1

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Use this option to select the focus of the search. You will subsequently be able to define the flow (import or export) and the partner country or region.

Some 250 countries and territories (such as Greenland or Hong Kong) are available. The bracketed numbers after the countries and territories refer to the Correlates of War project's classification system.

Please click on 'include data in dependencies' if you want the search to also cover a country's dependencies. For example, selecting this option would provide on both Denmark and Greenland. This option will not be available if the country in question has no dependant territories.

Imports from or exports to

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Please select the relationship between the parties selected in options two and four.

Select country 2

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Use this option to select the partner country or region. The countries included in this option have been dynamically generated according to the previous selections (reverse querying, country 1, and import/export).

The bracketed numbers after the countries and territories refer to the Correlates of War project's classification system.

Please select 'include data on dependencies' if you want the search to also cover a country's dependencies. For example, selecting this option would provide on both Denmark and Greenland. This option will not be available if a particular country does not have any dependencies.

Country Name

The database uses data reported in the various sources. Users should be aware that the destination, or origin, reported in the sources may not be actual source or end user of the weapons.

In some cases arms are re-exported through a number of countries. Where this is apparent we have made a note in the database. However, in many cases the ultimate origin and destination of weapons is not indicated.

Please note that during an upgrade of the database some country names were amended. (for example St. Kitts & Nevis was amended to St. Kitts-Nevis). Users of the Researchers database could use the 'Display in CSV format' which will provide the number which uniquely identifies each country.

Special destinations:

All countries - This term is used when a source identifies the total value of its exports of a particular weapon type. In practice, this figure is generally a sum of reported exports to individual destinations. Users should therefore be careful to avoid over-estimating countries arms exports.

However, some sources only provide aggregated figures. In such cases the 'All countries' figure represents the extent of available information.

Unspecified country - In many cases, data sources only indicate that a transfer has taken place, but do not list its origin or destination. This could be because the source wishes to censor the data, or is unaware of the actual destination/origin. Furthermore, many reports of customs data report small transfers (perhaps below 100 USD) do not list the import/exporting state.

Regions - Some sources list exports to regions. In some cases these may be an aggregation (similar to 'All countries' above). In other cases, the source just lists transfers to/from a region and does not identify the individual trading partner.

Furthermore, other sources list exports to regional organisations. For example, a transfer could be made to NATO, rather than to one of its member states.

Users are urged to look at the original data source for clarification.

Import and Export

Users should be aware that while the popular use of the terms 'import' and 'export' imply that the weapon in question are bought or sold, this is not always the case.

Weapons may be gifted, re-exported, or transferred temporarily for purposes of repair or demonstration etc. In particular, customs data does not show the context of a particular transfer.

Select PRIO arms classification

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The database uses information from a wide variety of sources. Unfortunately, there is no common global standard for classifying small arms and light weapons. While this project follows that provided in the 1997 UN panel of experts report, there exist many other regional (OSCE, EU) global (Wassenaar) and a myriad of national definitions.

Therefore, the various data sources provide a wide variety of descriptions of small arms and light weapons. In order to aid comparison between the various sources we have ascribed each weapon transferred a 'PRIO weapon type'.

The PRIO classification broadly follows the 1997 UN panel of experts report:

PRIO_Weapons Code	Description
100	Small Arms, Light Weapons, Ammunition, Explosives, Missiles, Parts & Accessories
150	Small Arms & Light Weapons
200	Small Arms
210	Pistols & Revolvers
220	Rifles/Shotguns - Sport
230	Rifles/Shotguns - Military
240	Machine Guns - Sub & Light
250	Military Weapons
300	Light Weapons
310	Machine Guns - Heavy
320	Cannon
330	Mortars < 100mm
340	Missile & Rocket Launchers - Man Portable
350	Grenade Launchers
400	Ammunition, Explosives & Missiles
405	Ammunition - all categories
410	Small Arms and Cannon Ammunition
415	Small Arms Ammunition
420	Grenades
430	Missiles & Rockets
440	Landmines
450	Military Explosives
500	Parts & Accessories

Please note that 100 is the top level code. If used, all weapon types will be selected. Code 250 anomalous and only refers to the customs category '930100'. In practice, it includes both small arms and light weapons.

Users are strongly advised to start their search using the code 100, and then narrow down their search. This is because some data sources provide only general descriptions of the small arms in question. Therefore a potentially interesting transfer may only be included at the higher level.

Select level of detail

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This option allows the user to select country specific weapon types or PRIO weapon types. The advantage of the former is that they are as close as possible to what was reported by the country or organization in question. However, that are not very comparable. As noted above, the PRIO weapon types are comparable (but of course lack the specificity of the country specific types).

Select start and end dates

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Please use these options to define the start and end dates for your search. The dates available are dynamically calculated based upon your previous selections in options 1-4.

Selecting long time periods (over several decades) may well produce excessively large datasets.

Select vendor type

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You can select whether to view information on government sales, sales by commercial companies, or both.

Note that commercial sales will normally require an export license.

Many data sources do not specify the vendor and are coded in the database as 'not known'. Users should use the 'all' option to include them.

Data Scope

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This option allows the user to define whether to search for:

- export license authorisations and deliveries;
- export license refusals; or
- both.

For more information on license authorisations, refusals, and deliveries please consult the following sections.

Authorisations / licenses Issued

This column states the number of export licenses that have been issued (according to the source).

Please note that in many cases small arms may not be delivered even after an export license has been granted (because of cancelled contracts etc).

For more information see the note on authorisations and deliveries, below.

Licenses Refused

This column shows the number of export licenses that were refused (according to the source).

For more information on the distinction between licenses and deliveries, see below.

Authorisation or Delivery

This column states whether the source reported an authorisation or a delivery of SALW. The distinction between the two is:

authorisations: refer to export licenses that have been granted by the relevant government department. Information on authorisations just refers to permission to export. It does not guarantee that the arms were actually delivered.

deliveries: refer to actual shipments of SALW that have arrived at the stated destination. Similarly, the existence of a delivery does not guarantee that an authorisation has been granted.

In practice the value of goods delivered are often less than those licensed for export. This can be because deals may be cancelled or reduced, or an exporter may request a license for a potential transaction which is not fulfilled.

Moreover, care should be exercised when comparing authorisations and deliveries (from different data sources). In some cases there may be a considerable delay between the authorisation and delivery (for example some UK licenses are valid for two years).

Furthermore, users should be aware that some transactions may be 'double counted' in the database. This may occur if two or more different sources provide information on the authorisation and delivery respectively.

Display all values in US Dollars

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All the transfers in the database are stored in the currency in which they were reported (euros, pounds, dollars etc). To aid comparison, this facility converts all the local currencies into US dollars.

The conversion rate is calculated using the average for the year in question, which has been supplied by [Oanda](#).

Please note that all figures in the database are presented in current USD, and users will have to adjust them for USD inflation if necessary.

Export data in CSV format

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This option produces output from the database in Comma Separated Variable (CSV) format. CSV formatted data can easily be imported into spreadsheet or data analysis programmes (such as Excel or SPSS).

Units

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This column states the number of units of SALW transferred (as stated by the source).

Value

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This column states the value of the SALW transfer (as stated by the source). The value figure is that which was stated in the source.

Please note that if you have selected to display all values in US dollars, this figure will have been recalculated using the average exchange rate of the year in question. The exchange rates were obtained from www.oanda.com .

Licenses Issued

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Please note that in many cases small arms may not be delivered even after an export license has been granted (because of cancelled contracts etc).

For more information see the note on [authorisations and deliveries](#).

Weight

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This column states the weight of the goods being transferred. Except where stated, this figure is in kilograms (kg).

Licenses Refused

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This column shows the number of export licenses that were refused (according to the source).

For more information on the distinction between licenses and deliveries, please refer to the following section.

Authorisation or Delivery

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Furthermore, users should be aware that some transactions may be 'double counted' in the database. This may occur if two or more different sources provide information on the authorisation and delivery respectively.

Government or Industrial sale

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This column shows the identity of the vendor. This is currently defined in three ways:

government: sales by government ministries of their SALW (for example the sale of surplus equipment by a ministry of defence).

industrial: commercial sales of SALW negotiated by companies. Please note that these will normally also have to receive a government export license.

not known: instances where no information is available.

Please see the notes on the individual data sources for more specific information.

Accuracy

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We provide an assessment of the accuracy of figures reported by the sources. This is not an indication of the reliability of the source. Instead it is a consequence of that many figures being reported by sources are rounded or are approximations.

The accuracy column contains one of three words 'low', 'medium' and 'high'. These are defined as:

low: the source supplied estimates accurate to, and figures rounded to, more than the nearest USD 1000 (for example, a report that a country had exported USD 1.2 million worth of ammunition);

medium: the source supplied estimates accurate to, and figures rounded to, USD 1000 or less (for example, a report that a country exported \$59 000 worth of small arms).

In addition, all instances in which the person responsible for data entry has calculated a figure are defined as 'medium'. For example, if small arms were defined as comprising 56.879% of a country's total arms exports of USD 200 000, then we would calculate the figure as being USD 113 758. As the figure had not been directly supplied by the source, its accuracy would be described as being 'medium'.

high: the source supplied figures with no evident estimation, rounding or calculation.

Please note that an assessment of the reliability of the source is provided in a different column (reliability, outlined in the following section). It is possible for a reliable

source to provide an inaccurate figure (for example, a government report might state that approximately USD 500 000 worth of small arms were exported during a particular year).

Reliability

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We provide a description of the source and a subjective judgment concerning its reliability. These are each defined by two categorisations. Concerning the description of the source, they are:

Primary: original documents produced by the party involved in the transfer (such as a government report on its arms exports); and eye witness reports.

Secondary: information reported by a third party (such as a press report).

Concerning the reliability of the source, this is divided into two categorisations - high and less. This is based on a subjective judgment by the person responsible for entering the data. In general it is based upon an assessment of the veracity of the information provided by the source which is based upon our assessment of whether the source has systems in place to check data and ensure data quality.

Please note that an evaluation of the accuracy of the figure provided by the source is provided in a different column (accuracy). It is possible for a reliable source to provide an inaccurate figure (for example, a government report might state that approximately USD 500 000 worth of small arms were exported during a particular year).

Small Arms Only

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Some transfers comprise equipment that is entirely covered by the 1997 UN panel of experts definition of small arms and light weapons. In such cases the column includes 'yes'.

In other cases the column includes 'no'. This occurs in two cases:

- if the material includes both SALW and other equipment (for example, if a transaction were for 'machineguns and howitzers'); or
- if the description of the material does not specify whether it covers SALW or not (for example, reports of transfers of 'ammunition').