



Small Arms Transfers: Exporting States

The Small Arms Survey estimates the annual authorized trade in 'small arms'¹ to exceed USD 7 billion a year (Small Arms Survey, 2011, p. 9).² A lack of transparency on the part of many states and difficulties of disaggregating data on transfers that some states do report create numerous challenges for the study of this activity. Lists of the most active countries tend to be skewed toward those that are more transparent or cater to large civilian markets. Nonetheless, sufficient data and expertise exist to allow for broad assessments to be made about the trade in small arms. This *Research Note* assesses the countries that export the greatest value of small arms. It does not focus on volumes of materiel or a transfer's effect on peace and security.

States report on their arms transfers very unevenly. Some are very transparent, while others are secretive. Sometimes countries view transfers of small arms as 'aid', 'gifts', or 'security assistance' for which no payment is made or customs fees levied. These transfers tend not to appear in open records. Nevertheless, customs data is an especially important source of data,³ as are countries' national arms export reports and submissions to the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA).⁴ The news media as well as research and advocacy organizations also help shed light on this activity. The Survey has supplemented these sources by contacting governments and industry officials directly, some of whom have provided information not otherwise available.

The rankings provided here tend to capture more accurately the activities of those countries that are more forthcoming in publicly recording their exports. Moreover, the dollar values of countries' exports are, generally speaking, *underestimates*. For example, it is not possible

to disaggregate data that some states report on transfers of particularly expensive weapons systems such as man-portable air defence systems and anti-tank guided weapons, as well as materiel traded in large volumes such as munitions for mortars. Such export figures are often conflated with larger missile systems or conventional artillery systems and munitions (Small Arms Survey, 2011, pp. 12–13). Accordingly, the list of countries in Table 1 below relies heavily on—but is not limited to—customs data. The transfer of technology (including licensed production), in which the percentages of components and their values produced locally or transferred from abroad are not made public or change over time, also creates challenges. The values of declared deliveries can differ significantly from licences granted (Weber and Bromley, 2011, pp. 3–5), further obfuscating an already murky picture.

That said, at least 16 countries have exported more than USD 100 million worth of small arms in a single calendar year since 2001. Analysis through 2008⁵ indicates that the country with the largest recorded exports is the United States (which transferred at least USD 700 million in small arms in 2008), followed by Italy and Germany (which both exported more than USD 300 million in small arms annually over the five-year period 2004–08). Other countries reporting that they habitually export more than USD 100 million in small arms annually are Austria, Belgium, and Brazil. The Survey believes that China and the Russian Federation also routinely export more than USD 100 million in small arms, although their own reporting is very limited.⁶ An analysis of customs data suggests that eight other countries—Canada, Israel, Norway, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom—have exported

Table 1 Exporters of small arms, 2001–08 (estimated annual average value)

Category		Value (USD million)	States (listed alphabetically in each row)
Top exporters	Tier 1	500+	1: United States
	Tier 2	100–499	7: Austria, Belgium, Brazil, China, Germany, Italy, Russian Federation
Major exporters	Tier 3	50–99	13: Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Israel, Japan, Norway, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom
	Tier 4	10–49	18: Bulgaria, Croatia, India, Iran, Mexico, Netherlands, North Korea, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, Taiwan, Ukraine

Note: At least ten countries have exported USD 10 million or more in small arms in a single calendar year between 2001 and 2008, but exported *on average* less than USD 10 million annually during this period: Argentina, Australia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, Denmark, Hungary, Montenegro, the Philippines, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Sources: Small Arms Survey (2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; including online annexes available at <<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org>>); and author's interviews.

USD 100 million or more in small arms in a year, but not routinely (Small Arms Survey, 2010, p. 8; 2011, p. 10).

Besides the 16 countries mentioned above, at least 33 other countries have exported USD 10 million or more in small arms in a single year since 2001. Of these 49 countries, 13 may be described as mid-level exporters, having regularly transferred USD 50–99 million in small arms annually between 2001 and 2008. This would include the eight countries recorded to have broken the USD 100 million threshold on one or two occasions (in 2007 and 2008) plus the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Japan, and Sweden. Analysis of customs data shows small arms exports from Israel, Norway, South Korea, Switzerland, and Turkey to have risen significantly during the period 2005–08. At least 18 countries have averaged exports of USD 10–49 million between 2001 and 2008 (see Table 1).

A lack of transparency obscures the picture presented above. Iran and North Korea are the most opaque of the 49 countries to have exported USD 10 million or more in small arms since 2001. Both countries, however, have major arms production facilities and are believed to export significant quantities of materiel. Other important exporters, such as Brazil, China, Japan, the Russian Federation, Singapore, and Turkey, fare poorly in terms of their reporting practices.

Many active exporters have small, dormant, or non-existent production facilities. This would include countries that engage in trans-shipment (such as Cyprus and the UAE) or export large surpluses (such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Saudi Arabia, and Ukraine). This has implications for any potential Arms Trade Treaty. ■

Sourcing

This *Research Note* is based on a series of *Small Arms Survey* yearbook chapters for which Nicolas Marsh and Matt Schroeder were the primary authors. The *Research Note* was written by Eric G. Berman.

Notes

- 1 The term 'small arms' refers to small arms and light weapons, as well as their related munitions, parts, and certain accessories. For more-specific criteria, see UNGA (1997); Small Arms Survey (2008, pp. 8–11; 2011, p. 10).
- 2 The Survey will complete its four-year re-evaluation of authorized trade next year with the publication of *Small Arms Survey 2012*, when it assesses small arms parts and accessories.

- 3 The Survey bases its global assessment of customs data on analysis provided by its partner: the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). For background information on the UN Commodity Trade Statistics Database (more commonly known as UN Comtrade) as it concerns evaluating the trade in small arms, see Small Arms Survey (2005, pp. 99–100; 2009, pp. 26–31).
- 4 UNROCA, created in 1993, initially focused on seven systems of conventional weaponry that excluded what the Survey—and most other commentators—would refer to as 'small arms'. In 2003 UNROCA was amended to include some missile systems and infantry artillery pieces that do fall under the 1997 UN Panel's listing of small arms and light weapons. And in 2006 UNROCA added a voluntary eighth category on small arms, which an increasing number of states utilize (see, for example, Holtom, 2009).
- 5 The Survey and PRIO wait two years before analysing a calendar year's global customs data. Many countries need this additional time to submit and correct their data.
- 6 The Russian Federation is reported to have shown little enthusiasm for recent multi-lateral efforts to improve its transparency on small arms transfers; see, for example, Boese (2003, p. 20); Holtom (2010, p. 81).

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This *Research Note* forms part of a series that is available on the Small Arms Survey website at <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/publications/by-type/research-notes.html>. The online version of this document will be updated as more information becomes available. For additional information on small arms transfers, please visit: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/transfers.html>

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The Small Arms Survey serves as the principal international source of public information on all aspects of small arms and armed violence, and as a resource centre for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and activists. The Survey distributes its findings through Occasional Papers, Issue Briefs, Working Papers, Special Reports, Books, and its annual flagship publication, the *Small Arms Survey*.

The project has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, international public policy, law, economics, development studies, conflict resolution, sociology and criminology, and works closely with a worldwide network of researchers and partners.

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