

State Stockpiles

TRICKLE AND TORRENT

No country is immune to loss of its official weapons. In most countries the process is a trickle, caused by small-scale theft and pilferage. In other countries there is a steady stream of lost small arms, often exacerbated by corruption. In the worst case, loss of control can degenerate into an outright torrent as entire government arsenals with hundreds of thousands or millions of weapons disappear into unknown hands.

The sight of public arsenals undermining public security is a reminder of the fundamental importance of stockpile management and security. The risks are widely acknowledged, as the 2001 *UN Programme of Action* testifies. But policy-making has been retarded, in the first instance by the lack of basic information. How many military and law enforcement small arms are there in the world? Which countries have the largest arsenals? Which are at greatest risk of loss?

Official reports confirm the existence of 910,615 law enforcement firearms. Approximately 25.4 million others are estimated to exist, for a combined global total of 26.3 million law enforcement weapons. Although it cannot be quantified, there is a marked tendency for law enforcement agencies to invest in more powerful weapons, especially since the 1980s, when criminals began to use automatic weapons with greater frequency. Matching the firepower of civilians has led more law enforcement agencies to invest in automatic rifles and grenade launchers.

More than 26 million law enforcement firearms are believed to exist worldwide.

Government armed forces own approximately 200 million modern firearms.

Extrapolation techniques show there are approximately 200 million modern, official military firearms worldwide, with a confidence range of 150 million to 250 million. A key measure of international transparency, 16,328,000 military firearms have been publicly declared by their governments. This is roughly eight per cent of the suspected total. Global military firearms inventories are concentrated among relatively few countries, with approximately two-thirds controlled by just ten countries.



North Korea's annual military propaganda spectacle in 2005. The country hosts an extreme example of a People's War military based on massive infantry forces.
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Table 2.13 The 20 largest estimated military firearms arsenals*

Country	Rank	Estimated or confirmed firearms	Low parameter	High parameter
China	1	41,000,000	31,000,000	52,000,000
Russian Federation	2	30,000,000	22,000,000	37,000,000
Korea, North	3	14,000,000	9,000,000	16,000,000
Vietnam	4	9,800,000	7,400,000	12,000,000
Korea, South	5	7,100,000	5,300,000	8,900,000
Ukraine	6	7,000,000	7,000,000	7,000,000
India	7	6,300,000	4,700,000	7,800,000
Taiwan	8	5,000,000	3,800,000	6,300,000
Turkey	9	4,400,000	3,300,000	5,500,000
Iran	10	3,700,000	2,800,000	4,600,000
Top ten combined total		128,000,000	96,000,000	157,000,000
Germany, F.R.	11	3,100,000	2,400,000	3,900,000
United States	12	3,054,553	3,054,553	3,054,553
Italy	13	3,000,000	2,200,000	3,700,000
Pakistan	14	2,900,000	2,200,000	3,600,000
Egypt	15	2,700,000	2,000,000	3,400,000
Cuba	16	2,600,000	2,000,000	3,300,000
France	17	2,400,000	1,800,000	3,000,000
Poland	18	2,300,000	1,700,000	2,800,000
Indonesia	19	2,200,000	1,600,000	2,700,000
Brazil	20	2,100,000	1,600,000	2,600,000
Top 20 combined total		155,000,000	117,000,000	189,000,000

* In descending order, rounded to two significant digits.

Source: Appendix II

Most governments lack a domestic office for this purpose. Official transparency is inhibited by the tendency to rely on National Points of Contact, as designated under the *Programme of Action*. Typically located in foreign ministries, these tend to stress *external* aspects of small arms policy and lack authority or information about *domestic* matters, such as national military stockpiles.

Many governments are willing to provide data on official small arms, but there is no international mechanism to facilitate reporting. A key to better transparency in military small arms is the establishment of an international mechanism for *systematic reporting*. A reporting mechanism, even if entirely voluntary, would catalyse transparency, encouraging cooperation by creating a venue for it. Reporting is most likely to occur when structured through *custodial authorities*, government agencies with actual control over small arms stockpiles.

One key to better transparency in military small arms is the establishment of an international mechanism for systematic reporting.

The government-owned small arms identified in this chapter constitute the largest coherent stockpiles in the world. The guns in civilian hands, by contrast, are typically dispersed among millions of owners in small individual holdings. Government-owned small arms, concentrated among a few owners, can move in vast quantities. They always will be tempting targets for theft, illegal diversion, and questionable sales. Their very presence also creates a serious danger of sudden and catastrophic loss of control. ■