Monitoring and visualizing the small arms trade; the case for public reporting on the arms trade

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Monitoring the small arms trade

Small arms project at PRIO set up in 1997
From 2001 developed a database of the small arms trade

• Just contains official data
• Database contains over a million records

Also undertake daily media searches and store documents on an online archive
• Contains some 40,000 articles
Analyzing the data

• Developed a global dataset based upon Comtrade in 2003
• Based upon a single source
• Useful – has a single global classification system
• But there are gaps in reporting
  – *Small Arms Survey 2009*: found that using additional data sources increased the identified value of military firearms by 32%
  – *Some major exporters are mostly absent* – Ukraine.
Updating the dataset

• Wanted to create a dataset which would include data from many different sources

• Diverse weapons classification systems and types of data:
  – License authorizations or actual deliveries
  – Financial value or units
  – Different currencies

• Used the NISAT database www.prio.no/nisat
Method for creating a single dataset

- Based upon Small Arms Survey 2009 (done by hand)
- Use mirroring – find out about exports by looking at imports
- Gave every weapon type our own classification
  - eg pistols are ‘210’
- Convert other currencies into USD, adjust for inflation
- Convert units into financial value
- Develop a hierarchy of sources
  - Decide which sources are more reliable eg, prefer data from national reports to Comtrade
- Adjust records to avoid double counting (unspecific)
Display of the MAD visualization

• Show what can be done with publicly reported data
• Highlight trends and the structure of the trade
• Make the trade more understandable
• Originally developed by Google Ideas, now run by PRIO and the Igarapé Institute
• Available at www.prio.no/data/mapping-arms-data/
The case for public reporting

• Build confidence among states
  – Show that all are acting in accordance with international commitments

• Encourage oversight by national legislatures and civil society
  – Governments can present the whole picture

• Prevent diversion
  – Need to understand the licensed flows
Information already collected

• Export licensing
  – Exporting companies already need to apply for licenses

• Customs authorities collect data on imports and exports of small arms and their ammunition
  – Often reported to the UN’s commodity statistics database (Comtrade)
  – Between 2007 and 2012
    • 115 states reported on trade in pistols
    • 124 states reported on trade in ammunition
Don’t need to provide commercially sensitive information

• Aggregate the types small arms together
  – Small arms in general (eg ML1)
  – Types of small arms (eg Pistols and Revolvers)

• Only provide number of units or price
  – UN Register just includes number of units
  – Many national reports just report total financial value
Level of reporting

- 124 states have reported on at least one small arms and light weapons category to Comtrade
- 35 states have published a national arms export report
- 56 states have reported background information on small arms and light weapon transfers to the UN Register
Asking for better public reporting

• Easy issue to campaign on
  • governments often have the data
  • media is interested if it appears that the government is being secretive

• Low cost, easy for governments to implement

• Problems
  – Sometimes data collection capacity is lacking
  – Entrenched cultures of secrecy
Thanks for your attention

– Visit the online database at www.prio.no/nisat

– Visit the Mapping Arms Data project at www.prio.no/data/mapping-arms-data/