

The Wassenaar Arrangement at a Glance

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The Wassenaar Arrangement, formally established in July 1996, is a voluntary export control regime whose 39 members¹ exchange information on transfers of conventional weapons and dual-use goods and technologies. Through such exchanges, Wassenaar aims to promote “greater responsibility” among its members in exports of weapons and dual-use goods and to prevent “destabilizing accumulations.” Unlike its predecessor, the Cold War-era Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM), which was created to restrict exports to the former Soviet Union and Eastern bloc, Wassenaar is not targeted at any region or group of states, but rather at “states of concern” to members. Wassenaar members also lack veto authority over other member’s proposed exports, a power that COCOM members exercised.

To promote transparency, Wassenaar calls on states to make a series of voluntary information exchanges and notifications on their export activities related to weapons and items appearing on the arrangement’s two control lists.

For the Munitions List (Conventional Weapons):

Every six months, members exchange information on deliveries of conventional arms to non-Wassenaar members that fall under eight broad weapon categories: battle tanks, armored combat vehicles (ACVs), large-caliber artillery, military aircraft/unmanned aerial vehicles, military and attack helicopters, warships, missiles or missile systems, and small arms and light weapons. Members added the final category in December 2003 after years of debate. The ACV, aircraft, and helicopter categories include models designed to perform reconnaissance or conduct command of troops missions.

For the Dual-Use Goods and Technologies List:

Tier 1: Basic Items

- Twice per year, members exchange information on all export licenses denied on proposed transfers to non-Wassenaar members.

Tier 2: Sensitive Items and its subset of Very Sensitive Items

- Within 60 days, members are requested to notify the Wassenaar Secretariat of any export licenses denied on proposed transfers to non-Wassenaar members.
- Twice per year, members exchange information on all export licenses issued or transfers made to non-Wassenaar members.
- For the subset of Very Sensitive items, such as stealth technology materials and advanced radar, members are called on to “exert extreme vigilance” in exports.
- Within 60 days, members are requested to notify the Wassenaar Secretariat of any export license approvals of transactions that are

“essentially identical” to transactions that another Wassenaar member denied within the past three years. Wassenaar members are not obligated to deny transfers previously denied by others.

Although Wassenaar has overcome a great deal of growing pains, problems persist. Foremost among the arrangement’s difficulties is that members continue to be divided over Wassenaar’s scope, primarily whether the arrangement should become more than just a body for exchanging and collecting information. Because Wassenaar operates by consensus, a single country can block any proposal. In earlier years, a few members consistently refused to fully participate in voluntary information exchanges and notifications on dual-use goods, though participation has reportedly improved.² In addition, there is no consensus among members on which countries are “states of concern” or what constitutes a “destabilizing” transfer. Another limiting factor is that some major arms exporters—such as Belarus, China, Israel, and South Africa—are not members.

During the arrangement’s nine years of operation, Wassenaar members have reaffirmed their commitment to preventing terrorist groups and individuals from acquiring conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies, agreed to “exercise maximum restraint” in exports to the Great Lakes region of Africa, gradually expanded the types of weapons exports that information is exchanged upon, and agreed on the importance of “responsible export policies” on small arms and light weapons. At its December 1998 plenary meeting, the members approved a paper of non-binding criteria to help governments determine whether potential arms exports could lead to destabilizing accumulations.³ Wassenaar members have also agreed on non-binding criteria to guide exports of shoulder-fired, surface-to-air missiles, formally referred to as Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS), and endorsed voluntary “best practices” for disposing of surplus military equipment, enforcing national export controls, and controlling Very Sensitive dual-use exports. They have also approved non-binding criteria to guide exports of small arms and light weapons, agreed to exercise greater control on arms brokers, and committed to better regulate exports of dual-use goods purchased by recipients subject to arms embargos if the item is intended for a military end-use.

NOTES

1. The 39 participating states in the Wassenaar Arrangement are Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
2. Wassenaar members agreed that all information exchanges, notifications, and Wassenaar discussions be kept confidential.
3. The Arms Control Association can provide copies upon request.

ACA Fact Sheet
