

Briefing Paper

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CALCULABLE LOSSES?

Arms Transfers to Afghanistan 2002–21

Matt Schroeder



Credits and contributors

Editor and project coordinator:

Emile LeBrun

Production and communications coordinators:

Olivia Denonville, Katie Lazaro, and Lionel Kosirnik

Fact-checker:

François Fabry

Copy-editor:

Erin J. Brewer

Design and layout:

Rick Jones

Proofreader:

Stephanie Huitson

About the author

Matt Schroeder is a senior researcher at the Small Arms Survey, where he studies the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and strategies for mitigating the threat from illicit weapons. He previously served as the director of the Arms Sales Monitoring Project at the Federation of American Scientists. Matt is the co-author of *The Small Arms Trade* and has written articles for numerous publications, including *Arms Control Today*, *Defense News*, *Defense Technology International*, *Disarmament Forum*, *Foreign Policy*, and *Jane's Intelligence Review*. He holds a bachelor's degree in history from Wittenberg University and a master's in international security policy from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

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Front cover photo

A Taliban fighter stands guard at a checkpoint in Kabul, Afghanistan, 22 August 2021.

Source: Rahmat Gul/AP Photo



Overview

The Taliban's seizure of the Afghan government's arsenal marked one of the largest illicit acquisitions of arms in recent history. Over a few months in 2021, the insurgents took control of government storage facilities containing billions of dollars in weapons and other military equipment. Images of Taliban fighters carrying US-made rifles and driving US military vehicles underscored the threat posed by these items.

Despite this threat, precise data on the seized weapons is scant. Dozens of countries exported materiel to Afghanistan from 2002 to 2021, and reporting by many of these countries is spotty at best. The resulting data gaps hinder efforts to track the proliferation of the seized weapons, both within Afghanistan and abroad. The following Briefing Paper addresses these problems by collecting and analysing publicly available data on arms exports to Afghanistan, identifying gaps in this data, and filling in some gaps with previously unreleased data obtained from the US government.

Key findings

- A United States Department of Defense (US DoD) report obtained by the Small Arms Survey estimated that nearly three-quarters of the 427,015 small arms and light weapons procured by the US DoD from 2005 to 2021 remained in Afghanistan¹ as of March 2022. The US DoD itself assesses the accuracy of the data in one of its key sources as 'LOW CONFIDENCE', however, noting that 'actual stock levels are further assessed to be lower than reflected' (US DoD, 2022).
- Existing evidence suggests that exports of small arms and light weapons to Afghanistan from countries other than the United States were more numerous than commonly assumed. Data collected by the Small Arms Survey indicates that more than 300,000 small arms and light weapons were transferred to Afghanistan from countries other than the United States from 2002 to 2021.
- While existing data provides some insight into the types, models, and, to a lesser extent, quantities of small arms and light weapons exported to Afghanistan from 2002 to 2021, incomplete and ambiguous reporting by exporting states precludes a full accounting of exported arms and ammunition.

Introduction

The sudden collapse of the Afghan government in August 2021 caught much of the world by surprise and sent shockwaves through policy circles in the region and beyond. Among the numerous, difficult issues that required immediate attention was the fate of billions of dollars in military equipment sitting in Afghan storage facilities. Estimates of the amount of materiel in those facilities varied, but one thing that everyone could agree on was that the Taliban had significantly upgraded its arsenal. There was also widespread consensus that the sudden change in ownership of the large quantities of arms and ammunition posed a profound proliferation threat in Afghanistan and throughout the region. Images of rank-and-file Taliban fighters driving American military vehicles and displaying looted US-made rifles seemed to confirm these fears. These images also raised the spectre of massive outflows of US-made weapons to neighbouring countries and possibly further afield.

Despite the obvious threat posed by the seized Afghan arsenals, detailed data on their contents has proven elusive. Most media accounts simply repeat estimates of the total value of the seized equipment from US government officials. Data on specific categories of items, including small arms and light weapons, is sparse and not readily accessible. These data gaps and shortcomings hinder efforts to track proliferation trends and identify and trace seized weapons.

This Briefing Paper attempts to fill in some of these data gaps by acquiring previously unreleased data on arms exports to Afghan forces from 2002 to 2021 and US estimates of Afghanistan's inventory at the time of the collapse while assessing the accuracy, completeness, and veracity of this data. The data in this paper is more complete than in previous publications, but it is not comprehensive. As explained below, comprehensive data is unavailable due to reporting gaps, ambiguities, and over-aggregation in publicly available data. These problems, along with concerns about the accuracy of non-public data, are also briefly addressed in the paper.

Terms and definitions

The Small Arms Survey (hereafter referred to as 'the Survey') defines 'small arms' as firearms designed for use by a single

“The data reveals some notable features and patterns of arms exports to Afghanistan.”

individual. Small arms are divided into five main subcategories:

- revolvers and self-loading pistols;
- rifles and carbines;
- shotguns;
- sub-machine guns; and
- light machine guns.

‘Light weapons’ are defined as weapons that are generally designed for use by a small crew of two or three people, although some are operated by a single individual. The Survey divides this category into eight subcategories:

- heavy machine guns;
- handheld, underbarrel, and mounted grenade launchers;
- portable anti-aircraft guns;
- portable anti-tank guns;
- recoilless rifles;
- portable launchers of anti-tank missiles and rocket systems;
- portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems; and
- mortar systems of calibres of 120 mm or less.²

These definitions are largely consistent with the US DoD’s terminology, which is important because most of the data used in this paper comes directly from—or originated with—the US DoD.³ The only notable differences are:

1. the calibre cut-off for mortar systems at 120 mm versus 81 mm for the US DoD;
2. the absence of a reference to portable missiles in the US DoD’s definition; and
3. the US DoD’s catch-all category of ‘individually operated weapons that are portable or can be fired without special mounts or firing devices and are vulnerable to theft’ (US DoDIG, 2012, p. 1).

These differences had little discernible effect on the collation and analysis of the data, however.

The terms ‘US-funded’, ‘US-procured’, and ‘US-purchased’ are rarely defined and are frequently used interchangeably in the media and government reports. These terms generally refer to arms, ammunition, and other materiel purchased with US government funds appropriated through the various security assistance programmes overseen and implemented by the US DoD and the US Department of State.⁴ Some US-procured defence articles are exported directly from the United States, while others are purchased in and exported from third countries. In this paper, ‘US-exported’ refers to defence articles—made mainly by US-based manufacturers—exported from the United States.

Small arms and light weapons transfers to Afghanistan: 2002–21

Types and sources of arms and ammunition exported to the Afghan government

There has been considerable confusion regarding the quantity of arms and ammunition exported to the Afghan government over the past two decades. Immediately after the Taliban seized power, some US politicians falsely claimed that US-procured military equipment in the Afghan government inventories seized by the Taliban was worth USD 80 billion. These claims conflated the total estimated amount of military assistance, including training and salaries, with the equipment provided as part of this assistance. Social media users and, to a lesser extent, mainstream journalists echoed these claims.⁵ Further compounding this confusion were problems with available data on arms transfers to Afghanistan. As explained below, the US Department of Defense Inspector General (US DoDIG) and the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (US SIGAR) found significant problems with the US

DoD’s data on arms exports to Afghanistan. The net result is a collection of incomplete, conflicting, and sometimes erroneous figures on arms transfers and US military assistance that has muddled the public discussion of these important topics.

The most commonly cited data on arms and ammunition exported to Afghanistan comes from a 2017 report by the US Government Accountability Office (US GAO) and an unpublished report by the US DoD submitted to the US Congress in March 2022. Other data, including data provided in a 2009 US GAO report and a 2014 report by the US SIGAR, covers a shorter time frame. Data from these reports is listed in Table 1, along with data on US exports from 2017 to 2021 as reported to the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA). Data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act in 2023 from the US DoD is also included in the table, even though the data appears to be incomplete.

As revealed in the table, significant differences exist between the figures in the four reports. The US DoD’s total is lower than the other two, even though it covers a longer period. Definitely explaining this and other differences is impossible given the lack of public access to the organization’s source data and the US DoD’s cursory explanation of the methodology used in its 2022 report. Nonetheless, there is enough information in the reports to identify some possible explanations. For example, the US GAO’s total is derived from data on authorizations of arms exports rather than actual deliveries. Since not all export authorizations result in deliveries or deliveries of the quantity specified in the authorization, aggregated data on authorizations is often higher than data on deliveries. That difference may partially explain the notable difference between the US GAO’s and US DoD’s totals. It does not account for the large disparity between the figures in the US SIGAR’s 2014 report and US DoD’s 2022 total, however, both of which draw on deliveries stored in US DoD—and US DoD-funded—databases.⁶

The difference between the rate of transfers reflected in the US SIGAR’s figures and US DoD’s 2022 estimate may be explained, in part, by the correction of errors in the US DoD’s databases. As summarized in their 2014 report, the US SIGAR found numerous problems with the US DoD’s data, including missing information, duplicative data and

Table 1 Reported exports of US-procured small arms and light weapons to Afghanistan, 2004–21 (number of items)

Data source	Time frame	Authorized/delivered	Pistols	Rifles ^a	Shotguns	Machine guns ^b	Light weapons	Total
US DoD (2022)	2005–21	Delivered	64,300	264,600	9,115	56,155	32,845 ^c	427,015
US GAO (2017)	2004–16	Authorized	126,295	358,530	12,692	64,363	37,810 ^d	599,690
US GAO (2009)	2004–08	Delivered	62,055	117,163	6,704	35,778	20,503 ^e	242,203
US SIGAR (2014)	2004–13	Delivered	465,000 ^f				See note ^f	465,000
UN Arms Register (US exports)	2017–20	Authorized (2018) ⁱ / delivered (2017, 2019–20)	2,155 / 17,404	4,395 / 20,582	*	3,164 / 2,208	944 ^g / 821	10,658 / 42,015^h
US DSCA (US FOIA) ⁱ (2023)	2002–21	'LOA ^j implemented date'	49,576	164,274	131	20,504	11,098 ^k	245,583

Notes:

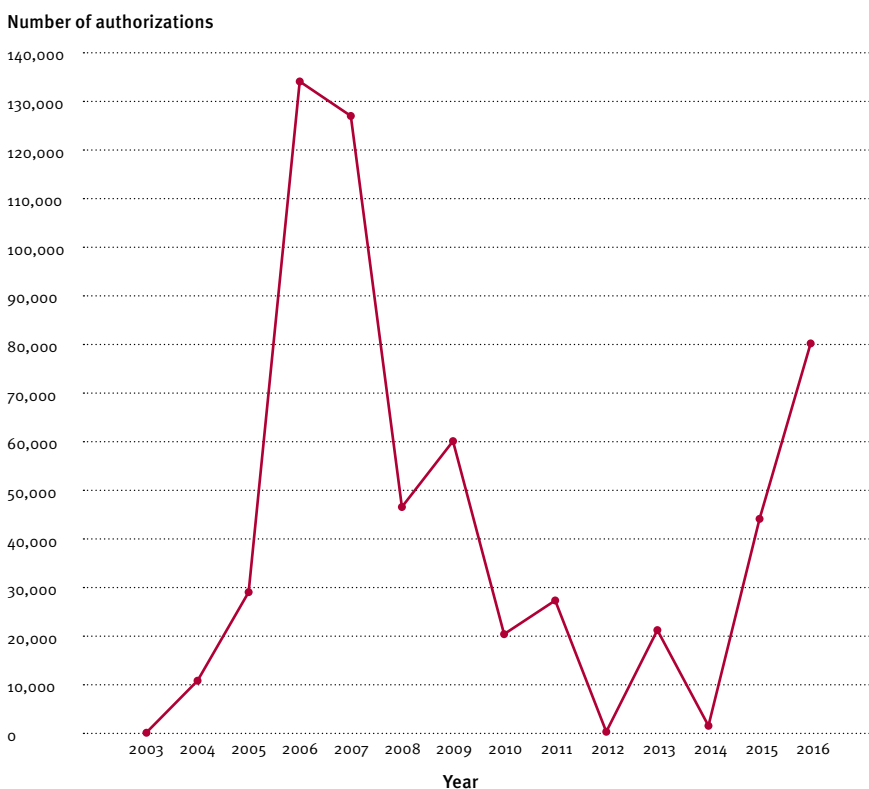
- a Includes rifles and carbines.
- b Includes light and heavy machine guns.
- c Includes 'rocket-propelled and various 40 mm mobile and hand-held grenade launchers' and '60-82 mm mortar systems' (US DoD, 2022).
- d Includes 'grenade launchers (such as 40mm non-lethal, GP-25/30 underbarrel, M203 underbarrel), rocket-propelled weapons (such as RPG-7, SPG-9)', and 'indirect fire weapons (such as 60mm mortar, 82mm mortar, D-30 122mm howitzer)' (US GAO, 2017).
- e Includes grenade launchers, RPG launchers, mortars, missiles, and rocket launchers (US GAO, 2009, p. 8).
- f Includes rifles, pistols, machine guns, grenade launchers, and shotguns (US SIGAR, 2014, p. 1).
- g Includes handheld underbarrel and mounted grenade launchers, recoilless rifles, portable anti-tank guns, portable anti-tank missile launchers and rocket systems, and mortars of calibres less than 75 mm (UNROCA, n.d.).
- h Data from the US DoD and reviewed by US SIGAR indicated that the US DoD supplied an additional 18,956 weapons to Afghanistan from 2018 through mid-2021. This figure is less than the 20,071 weapons delivered in 2019–20 and 10,658 authorized for export in 2018, as reported by the United States through UNROCA (US SIGAR, 2021; 2023b; UNROCA, n.d.).
- i DSCA is the Defense Security Cooperation Agency; US FOIA is the US Freedom of Information Act.
- j 'LOA' stands for Letter of Offer and Acceptance.
- k Includes grenade launchers—automatic, handheld, and underbarrel; mortar systems; recoilless rifles; and RPG launchers.
- * Denotes data not provided in the source document.

Sources: US DoD (2022); US GAO (2017); US SIGAR (2014; 2023b); UNROCA (n.d.); and US DoD (2023)

entries, and discrepancies between the US DoD's two main databases—the Security Cooperation Information Portal (SCIP) and Operational Verification of Reliable Logistics Oversight Database (OVERLORD).⁷ For example, an analysis of OVERLORD revealed missing or duplicative information regarding 203,888 of 474,823 serial numbers—or 43 per cent—of weapons recorded in the database.

Similarly, 24,520 serial numbers in OVERLORD and 22,806 in SCIP were repeated two or three times. In response to the discovery of these errors, the US DoD took steps to clean up the data, resulting in a decrease of duplicate serial numbers in SCIP from 22,806 to 6,004 and a reduction in discrepancies between the two databases from 14,822 to 1,136, according to the US DoD (US SIGAR, 2014, p. 5). These corrections, particularly the elimination of duplicate entries, may help explain the lower total in the US DoD's 2022 report. That said, even the US DoD's revised figures should be treated with caution. Problems with the data continued after the publication of US SIGAR's 2014 report, as explained in more detail below.

Figure 1 Authorizations of US-procured⁹ weapons for Afghanistan per year, 2003–16



Source: US GAO (2017, p. 6)

“The reports underscore the multinational composition of the Taliban’s newly acquired arsenal.”

Despite these flaws, the data does reveal some notable features and patterns of arms exports to Afghanistan. First, the data indicates that US procurement of weapons was not linear; the quantities varied significantly from year to year, and there was no consistent upward or downward trajectory during the 14 years covered in the data collected by the US GAO (see Figure 1).⁸

The reports—along with supplemental data from UNROCA and other sources—also underscore the multinational composition of the Taliban’s newly acquired arsenal. Much of the media coverage of the Taliban’s takeover focused almost exclusively on the US-made weapons in Afghan government inventories, giving the impression that all or nearly all the weapons acquired by the Taliban were manufactured in the United States. Many newspaper articles only mention ‘US-made’ weapons,¹⁰ and, with few exceptions,¹¹ the articles that acknowledge the seizure of weapons made in other countries only do so in passing. For example, a *New York Times* article published in October 2021 refers to ‘American-made’ weapons 14 times while only mentioning ‘weapons manufactured in other nations’ once (Khapalwak and Zucchini, 2021).

Available data suggests that US manufacturers were the largest source of small arms, light weapons, and ammunition but were not the only sources. Data compiled by the Survey reflects weapons transfers to Afghanistan from more than 30 countries, which is almost certainly an incomplete accounting given gaps in national reporting. Exports from these countries included more than 300,000 small arms and light weapons from 2002 to 2021.¹² This data underscores the multinational composition of Afghan arsenals and shared responsibility for the subsequent loss of weapons from the Afghan government to the Taliban.

Transfers of non-NATO standard weapons¹³ were the most intense during the initial years of US ‘train and equip’ efforts. Warsaw Pact weapons¹⁴ com-

prised a significant percentage of the US-procured weapons from 2002 to 2008 (US GAO, 2009, p. 7). The provision of Warsaw Pact weaponry to the Afghan national army (ANA) tapered off after the United States launched a concerted effort to equip it with NATO standard weapons, but transfers of non-US-made weapons continued. The Afghan national police (ANP) also moved away from Warsaw Pact weapons, but much more slowly than the ANA. Many of the AK-pattern weapons were replaced by M16s during this process and transferred to local police units, keeping them in Afghan government inventories (US SIGAR, 2017, p. 92).

Table 2 lists the arms identified by the Survey that were supplied and/or exported by countries other than the United States. The totals are likely a significant underestimate of small arms and light weapons transfers to Afghanistan, given the numerous and significant gaps in national reporting on arms transfers and the irreconcilable data from various reporting mechanisms.

Models and calibres

The multinational approach to equipping the Afghan government is also evident in the data on the models and calibres of small arms transferred to Afghanistan. In official documentation compiled by the US and other governments, the Survey identified nearly 100 models—or patterns—of small arms, light weapons, and light weapons ammunition transferred to the Afghan government (see Table 3). Like the data on quantities of exported arms and ammunition, publicly available data on models and calibres is only available for transfers from certain exporters and only for specific periods. As such, Table 3 is not a complete list of models and calibres.

The mixed approach to equipping the Afghan national defence and security forces (ANDSF) is also evident in exports of light weapons and ammunition (see Tables 4–5).

Data limitations

Vague and incomplete reporting on arms transfers by governments—a problem that has worsened in recent years—precludes a definitive accounting of all exports, let alone the specific models of exported arms and ammunition. Publicly available data on US-funded arms transfers to Afghanistan is often aggregated by categories such as ‘small arms ammunition’; subcategories such as ‘pistols’; or various, and often, poorly defined groupings of models of weapons in the same subcategories such as ‘M4/M16 and AK-variant rifles’. While useful for conveying the size and scope of national exports or security assistance programmes, data aggregated in this way is of little value for identifying diversion points, tracking illicit arms flows, or holding security forces accountable for misuse of exported weapons. Proper accountability would require releasing disaggregated data that identifies each exported weapon’s make, model, calibre, and serial number—or partial serial number—and the make, model, calibre, and batch or lot numbers for exported ammunition. None of the data released by the US government fits this description.

Data from the most prominent international reporting mechanisms also lacks key details and is often difficult to verify. The UN Commodity Trade Statistics Database (COMTRADE), for example, houses government-submitted data on millions of arms transfers dating back to 1962. While voluminous, the data provides no information on the make, model, or calibre of transported items, and is aggregated in such a way that precludes the tracking of individual transfers or assessing the accuracy of their categorization. Far fewer states submit data to mechanisms that allow for more detailed, disaggregated reporting, such as UNROCA. An average of just 36 states submitted data on transfers of small arms and light weapons to UNROCA annually from 2017 to 2021, and only a small percentage of these states list the make, model, or calibre of transferred weapons in their reports.¹⁵

Mechanisms established to improve transparency and access to government data are essential, but their utility is often limited by lengthy processing times or restrictive submission criteria. Records obtained under the US Freedom of Information Act (US FOIA) yielded the most detailed data used in this study. The documentation, which was released in

Table 2 Reported exports of small arms and light weapons to Afghanistan from countries other than the US, 2002–21^a

Country	Items (quantity/value)	Years
Albania	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (918)	2002–06
	AK-47 assault rifles (10,000)	2011
	Total: 10,918 weapons	
Austria	ML1 ^b (EUR 670,143)	2005–08, 2010, 2013
	Total: EUR 670,143	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Assault rifles (4,900)	2007
	Total: 4,900 weapons	
Bulgaria	Unspecified small arms and light weapons ^c (1,224)	2002–06
	Assault rifles (4,420)	2008, 2017
	Grenade launchers (10,206)	2008–10, 2012, 2017, 2019–20
	Light machine guns (12)	2009
	Recoilless rifles (1,047)	2010–11, 2017–19
	Total: 16,909 weapons	
Canada	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (2,500)	2002–06
	Assault rifles (2)	2014
	Rifles and carbines (45)	2015–16, 2018
	Total: 2,547 weapons	
Croatia	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (1,012)	2002–06
	Assault rifles (15,000)	2011
	Total: 16,012 weapons	
Czech Republic	ML1 ^b (EUR 2,360,806)	2004, 2007
	Assault rifles (78)	2011, 2015, 2020
	Portable anti-tank guns (585)	2011
	Revolvers and pistols (16,222)	2011–15, 2020
	Sub-machine guns (254)	2014, 2016–17, 2020
	Total: 17,139 weapons / EUR 2,360,806	
Egypt	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (17,199)	2002–06
	Total: 17,199 weapons	
Estonia	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (4,000)	2002–06
	Total: 4,000 weapons	
Germany	Unspecified small arms and light weapons ^c (10,000)	2002–06
	Assault rifles (88)	2008, 2010–13
	Total: 10,088 weapons	
Greece	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (300)	2002–06
	Rifles and carbines (8)	2020
	ML1 ^b (EUR 32,917)	2008
	Total: 308 weapons / EUR 32,917	
Hungary	Rifles and carbines (55,673) ^d	2007
	Total: 55,673 weapons	
India	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (3,864)	2002–06
	Total: 3,864 weapons	

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Country	Items (quantity/value)	Years
Lithuania	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (10,000)	2002–06
	Total: 10,000 weapons	
Montenegro	Assault rifles (1,500)	2007
	Light machine guns (100)	2007
	Machine guns; automatic rifles; sub-machine guns; tripods for sub-machine guns (3,308)	2009
	Grenade launcher (1,592)	2009
	Total: 6,500 weapons	
Netherlands	Revolvers and pistols (27)	2019
	Rifles and carbines (25)	2019
	Total: 52 weapons	
Norway	Mortars >75 mm (100)	2008
	Heavy machine guns (100)	2009
	Total: 200 weapons	
Pakistan	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (801)	2002–06
	Total: 801 weapons	
Poland	Unspecified small arms and light weapons ^b (108)	2002–06
	Assault rifles (1,810)	2009, 2012
	Grenade launchers (338)	2009, 2011–12
	Heavy machine guns (315)	2008–09, 2011
	Light machine guns (59)	2009, 2011
	Mortars <75 mm (20)	2009, 2011
	Portable anti-aircraft guns (4)	2009
	Portable anti-tank guns (4)	2009
	Portable anti-tank missile and rocket systems (639)	2011
	Recoilless rifles (43)	2009
	Revolvers and pistols (1,870)	2009, 2011–12
	Rifles and carbines (2,515)	2009, 2011
	Sub-machine guns (80)	2009, 2012
	Total: 7,805 weapons	
Portugal	ML1 ^b (EUR 327,203)	2014, 2016, 2018–19
	Total: EUR 327,203	
Romania	Unspecified small arms and light weapons ^c (11,390)	2002–06
	Assault rifles (25,915)	2008–10
	Grenade launchers (797)	2008
	Heavy machine guns (1,861)	2010–11, 2014, 2019
	Light machine guns (1,807)	2008, 2018, 2020
	Rifles and carbines (995)	2008, 2011, 2018
	Sub-machine guns (457)	2008
	Total: 43,222 weapons	

Country	Items (quantity/value)	Years
Serbia	Assault rifles (4,580)	2015–17, 2021
	Heavy machine guns (9,524)	2009–10, 2012–13, 2016–17
	Light machine guns (15,109)	2009–10, 2012–13, 2016–17
	Others [unspecified small arms] (2)	2012
	Revolvers and pistols (975)	2009–10
	Rifles and carbines (442)	2010, 2012, 2015–16
	Sub-machine guns (75)	2015–16
	ML1 ^b (EUR 166,627)	2019
	Total: 30,707 weapons / EUR 166,627	
Slovakia	Heavy machine guns (94)	2006
	Light machine guns (513)	2006
	Portable anti-tank guns (103)	2006
	Revolvers and pistols (790)	2006
	Total: 1,500 weapons	
Slovenia	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (12,033)	2002–06
	Assault rifles (6,680)	2011
	Total: 18,713 weapons	
Spain	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (259)	2002–06
	Total: 259 weapons	
Turkey	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (4,088)	2002–06
	Heavy machine guns (144)	2010
	Mortars >75 mm (950)	2010
	Total: 5,182 weapons	
Ukraine	Unspecified small arms and light weapons (666)	2002–06
	Total: 666 weapons	
United Kingdom	Assault rifles (14,686)	2007–19, 2021
	Heavy machine guns (392)	2008–09, 2016
	Light machine guns (28)	2012–13, 2015–16, 2021
	Revolvers and pistols (1,026)	2007–10, 2012–16, 2021
	Rifles and carbines (136)	2009–10
	Sub-machine guns (33)	2008, 2014
	Total: 16,301 weapons	
Total number of weapons	Small arms	192,245
	Light weapons	28,858
	Unspecified	80,362
	Small arms and light weapons (total)	301,465

Notes:

- a Some of the weapons listed in this table may have been procured with US funding.
- b Military list, category 1 (ML 1) covers smooth-bore weapons with a calibre of less than 20 mm, other arms and automatic weapons with a calibre of 12.7 mm—calibre 0.50 inches—or less, and accessories and specially designed components (CoEU, 2019).
- c UNROCA data from 2007 is not included as the totals from 2006 are sometimes reported in 2007 as well.
- d Data received by Conflict Armament Research in response to a trace request submitted in 2019. The US GAO reported that Hungary exported 46,944 unspecified small arms and light weapons from 2002 to 2006. It's not clear whether the US GAO's total includes some of the AMD-65 rifles. See CAR (2021) and US GAO (2009).

Sources: CoEU (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2019); SEESAC (2021); UN Comtrade (n.d.); UNROCA (n.d.); US GAO (2009)

Table 3 Prominent types, models, and calibres of small arms exported to Afghanistan, 2002–21

Category	Model**	Calibre	Select suppliers/ exporter(s)
Pistols	Beretta 92FS	9 mm	United States
	CZ 52	*	Slovakia
	CZ 75 P-07	*	Czech Republic
	Glock 19	*	United States
	M9	9 mm	United States
	P-64	*	Poland
	P83	*	Poland
	PX4 Type F	9 mm	United States
	TT	*	Poland
Machine guns	DShK	*	Romania, United States†
	M134D-H	7.62 mm	United States
	M2A1/M2 HB	.50 calibre	United States
	M240B/L/H	7.62 mm	United States
	M249	5.56 mm	United States
	M48	*	United States
	PK	*	United States†
	PKM	7.62 mm	Hungary, Montenegro, United States
	PKT/PKB	7.62 mm	Hungary
	RPK	7.62 mm	Hungary
	Type 59	7.62 mm	Slovakia
Rifles, infantry	AK pattern	*	Albania, Croatia, Greece, Slovenia
	AMMS	7.62 mm	Hungary
	AKMS	7.62 mm	Poland
	AMD-65	7.62 mm	Hungary
	M16/A2/A4	5.56 mm	Greece, United States
	M4A1	5.56 mm	United States, Greece
	M70	7.62 mm	Montenegro
Rifles, sniper	SVD Dragunov	7.62 mm	United States†
	M24	7.62 mm	United States
	M110	7.62 mm	United States
Shotgun	M500	12 gauge	United States

Notes:

* Denotes data not provided in the source document.

** Denotes model names as reported in the source document.

† Denotes that many of the Warsaw Pact weapons listed in US reports on exports to Afghanistan were procured with US funds from third countries and exported to Afghanistan from the source country.

Sources: US DoD (2023; n.d.); UNROCA (n.d.)

Table 4 Types, models, and calibres of light weapons exported to Afghanistan, 2002–21

Type	Model	Calibre	Supplier/exporter
Anti-personnel mines	M18A1	*	United States
Grenade launchers	GP-25/30	40 mm	United States
	M203/A1/A2	40 mm	United States
	M32A1	40 mm	United States
	MK19/MOD III	40 mm	United States
Heavy machine guns	M2	.50 calibre	Turkey, United States
	M2A1	.50 calibre	United States
	M2 HB	.50 calibre	United States
	DShK-38/46	12.7 mm	Poland
	DShKM	12.7 mm	Romania
	NSV	12.7 mm	United States
Mortar systems	M69, M69A	82 mm	Slovenia, United States
	M224	60 mm	United States
	M252	81 mm	United States
Portable anti-tank rocket systems	ATGL-L/L1	*	Bulgaria
	M136 AT4	84 mm	United States
	RPG-7 pattern	40 mm	Unspecified, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, United States
Recoilless rifles	ATGL-H1	*	Bulgaria
	SPG-9	73 mm	United States [†]

Notes:

* Denotes data not provided in the source document.

[†] Denotes that many of the Warsaw Pact weapons listed in US reports on exports to Afghanistan were procured with US funds from third countries and exported to Afghanistan from the source country.

Sources: AVOA (n.d.); US DoD (2023; n.d.); UNROCA (n.d.)

Table 5 Types, models, and calibres of light weapons ammunition exported to Afghanistan, 2002–21

Type	Model	Calibre
Mortar rounds	M302 series (smoke)	60 mm
	M374A3 (HE)	81 mm
	M375 series (WP)	81 mm
	M721 (Illum)	60 mm
	M722A1 (WP)	60 mm
	M767 (IR Illum)	60 mm
	M768/A1 (HE)	60 mm
	M769 (PRAC)	60 mm
	M83A3 (Illum)	60 mm
	M816 (IR Illum)	81 mm
	M853A1 (Illum)	81 mm
	M879 (PRAC)	81 mm
	M888 (HE)	60 mm
	M889A2 (HE)	81 mm
	M930 (Illum)	120 mm

→

Type	Model	Calibre
Projected grenades	GRD-40 (Smoke)	40 mm
	VOG-25/25P (HE Frag/HE bounding)	40 mm
	M385A1 (PRAC)	40 mm
	M430A1 (HEDP)	40 mm
	M433 (HEDP)	40 mm
	M583 (White star PRCHT)	40 mm
	M661 (Green star PRCHT)	40 mm
	M662 (Red star PRCHT)	40 mm
	M713 (Red smoke GRND)	40 mm
	M715 (Green smoke GRND)	40 mm
	M716 (Yellow smoke GRND)	40 mm
	M781 (PRAC)	40 mm
	M918 (PRAC)	40 mm
M922A1 (Dummy)	40 mm	
RPG rounds	OG-7V (HE Frag)	40 mm
Recoilless rifle rounds	OG-9V (HE Frag)	73 mm
Hand grenades (United States only)	M116A1	Simulation
	M18	Smoke (green, red, yellow, or violet)
	M67	Fragmentation
	M7 series	Chemical agent
	M76	Smoke screening IR
	M83	Practice
	AN-M8	Smoke
	M14	Incendiary
M84	Stun	

Note:

Frag = fragmentation; GRND = ground marker; HE = high explosives; HEDP = high explosive/dual purpose; Illum = illumination; IR Illum = infrared illumination; PRAC = practice; PRCHT = parachute; WP = white phosphorous.

Sources: US DoD (2023; n.d.); UNROCA (n.d.)

response to a 2022 request for ‘records on firearms, light weapons, and their ammunition exported—or supplied—to the ANDSF in the SCIP’, contains more than 1,450 records of arms, ammunition, and related items approved for transfer to Afghanistan from 2005 to 2021. Many records identify the type, model, calibre, quantity, value, and, to some extent, the recipient institution of exported arms, ammunition, explosives, and other materiel. Governments rarely release this level of detail on arms transfers, which is a testament to the comparative transparency and openness of the US government.

While useful, the documentation and the process of obtaining it is far from perfect. First, the responsive document

consists solely of a PDF containing raw data; there is no background information, methodological notes, or glossary, making it difficult to interpret some of the data and assess its comprehensiveness and veracity (see Image 1). This lack of explanatory information is due, in part, to the fact that government agencies are not required to create documents in response to US FOIA requests. Therefore, if the responsive materials are database printouts or other documentation that does not include background information, the releasing agency is not obligated to create and supply it separately. A related problem is that the releasing agency is not required to answer questions from requestors. Some

officials, however, do answer questions to avoid misinterpretation of their data and documents, but many do not.

Secondly, the US FOIA mechanism is chronically understaffed and overwhelmed with requests, resulting in wait times of months, years, or sometimes decades. The wait time for the data on arms transfers to Afghanistan (see Image 1) was less than a year, which is much faster than many FOIA requests. Other requests submitted for this paper were still pending at the time of publication, and responsive documents will likely not be received for many months or years. In other states, freedom of information mechanisms often process requests promptly, but restrictions on the scope of the requests

Image 1 Excerpt of US Department of Defense documentation obtained by the Small Arms Survey under the US Freedom of Information Act, 2023

Case Identifier	BAG	Case Description	Line Description	NSN ID	Line Quantity	LOA Implemented Date	Total Case Value	Estimated Delivery Completion Date
7H-B-UAL	ANA	PROCUREMENT OF M4 CARBINES	M4 Carbine	1005012310973	2,091	14 May 18	\$ 3,057,984.00	
7H-B-UAL	ANA	PROCUREMENT OF M4 CARBINES	M4 Carbine		1,205	14 May 18	\$ 3,057,984.00	
7H-B-UAL	ANA	PROCUREMENT OF M4 CARBINES	M4 Carbine		10	14 May 18	\$ 3,057,984.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	CARTRIDGE, 40MM HEDP M430A1 WITH M549A1 FUZE		150,016	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	CARTRIDGE, 40MM HEDP M430A1 WITH M549A1 FUZE		350,016	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	CARTRIDGE, 40 MILLIMETER, HIGH EXPLOSIVE DUAL PURPOSE, M433		13,752	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	ROCKET 2.75 INCH, HIGH EXPLOSIVE, WARHEAD M151, FUZE M423, MOTOR, MK66-4		12,000	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	WARHEAD 2.75 WTU 1/8 H663		12	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	122mm High Explosive Frag Full Charge		4,552	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	57mm Aviation Rocket High Explosive Frag		26,704	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	ROCKET COMPONENTS, PARTS & ACCESSORIES			18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	CARTRIDGE, 40MM HEDP M430A1 WITH M549A1 FUZE		149,888	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	CARTRIDGE, 40 MILLIMETER, HIGH EXPLOSIVE DUAL PURPOSE, M433		147,168	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	CARTRIDGE, 40 MILLIMETER, HIGH EXPLOSIVE DUAL PURPOSE, M433		150,048	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	CARTRIDGE, 7.62MM, 4 BALL, M80, 1 TRACER, M62, LINKED		5,000,000	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	CARTRIDGE, 60MM HIGH EXPLOSIVE, INSENSITIVE MUNITION, M768A1 WITH M783A1 FUZE		5,488	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	73MM High Explosive Fragmentation (SPG-9)		23,376	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	40MM High Explosive Fragmentation (RPG-7)		42,912	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	122MM High Explosive Fragmentation Full Charge (D-30)		5,910	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	57mm Aviation Rocket High Explosive Fragmentation		23,712	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	CARTRIDGE, 40MM HEDP M430A1 WITH M549A1 FUZE		225,216	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	CARTRIDGE, 40 MILLIMETER, HIGH EXPLOSIVE DUAL PURPOSE, M433		140,256	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	Cartridge, 12.7x108mm Ball		1,700,000	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
7H-B-UAW	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR THE ANA	Cartridge, 40mm OG-7V High Explosive Fragmentation		105,000	18 May 18	\$ 146,529,209.00	
AF-B-UBU	ANA	AMMUNITION FOR ANA	CARTRIDGE, 12 GAUGE SHOTGUN, #7-1/2 SHOT		10,500	11 Jun 14	\$ 29,867,801.00	

Source: US DoD (2023)

that permit quicker turnaround times also result in more denials and more limited releases, however. Finding a balance between the overly permissive US system and its overly restrictive counterparts in other governments would make freedom of information mechanisms more useful for researchers.

Arms and ammunition remaining in Afghanistan in August 2021

Available estimates of arms and ammunition remaining in Afghanistan when the government fell are incomplete and of varying reliability. The most detailed data obtained by the Survey comes from a congressionally-mandated US DoD report from March 2022. As described in the report’s preface, it covers ‘the disposition of US DoD materiel from 2020 through the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 and provides estimates based on the best available information of the status of US

DoD-funded materiel previously procured for the [ANDSF]’ (US DoD, 2022, p. 5).

The exported items are divided into seven categories: aircraft, aircraft munitions, ground vehicles, weapons, ground munitions, communications equipment, and night vision, surveillance, biometric, and positioning equipment. Of relevance to this study are the items categorized as ‘weapons’ and ‘ground munitions’, which are listed in Table 6.

As summarized in Table 6, the US DoD estimated that 316,260 items categorized as ‘weapons’ remained in Afghanistan in August 2021. In other words, US DoD records indicate that nearly 75 per cent of weapons transferred to the ANDSF from 2005 through July 2021 were still in Afghanistan when the Taliban took over. The US DoD does not explain how it arrived at this estimate, only stating that it was derived from ‘United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), US Army, and US Air Force records, and from inventory data from CoreIMS’ (US DoD, 2022, p. 5). No additional information about their methodology is included in the report.

Since the US DoD report only covers procurement from 2005 onward, weapons delivered to the ANDSF from 2002 to 2004 are presumably not included in the Table 6 totals. As noted above, these deliveries included at least 35,000 weapons supplied by various countries from 2002 until December 2004.¹⁶ Since many of the weapons reportedly arrived damaged and unusable (US GAO, 2009, p. 34), the actual number of weapons not accounted for in the US DoD’s 2022 report is an unknown percentage of those 35,000 weapons.

It is also unclear if the data includes all arms and ammunition produced in the United States or procured with US government funds. In the background section of the report, the US DoD references procurement of ‘equipment and supplies for the ANDSF through the Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) and its associated security assistance programs’, which would presumably include all or nearly all US DoD-procured arms and ammunition. In other sections of the report, however, the US DoD alternately refers to ‘US DoD-procured’ and

Table 6 Reported transfers of arms and ammunition to Afghanistan and estimates of items remaining in Afghanistan as of August 2021

Category	Items	Quantity exported (2005–21)	Value of exports (2005–21)	Quantity remaining in August 2021
Weapons	M4/M16 and AK-variant rifles	258,300	USD 150.7 million	316,260 weapons^a / USD 511.8 million
	Various pistols	64,300	USD 31.6 million	
	Various sniper rifles	6,300	USD 33 million	
	Individual and crew-serviced light (such as M249), medium (such as M240B/PKM), and heavy machine guns (such as M2/DShk)	56,155	USD 233.7 million	
	Rocket-propelled and various mobile and hand-held grenade launchers	31,000	USD 51.4 million	
	12-gauge shotguns of various models	9,115	USD 4 million	
	60–82 mm mortar systems	1,845	USD 41.6 million	
	Total	427,015^b	USD 546 million	
Weapons accessories	Associated machine gun mounts	5,500	USD 5.7 million	Unspecified
	M150 weapon optics and PEQ-2/15/18 laser aiming devices	41,350	USD 41.8 million	
	Total	46,850	USD 47.5 million	
Other ground munitions	120 mm and 122 mm mortar rounds	188,000	USD 121.7 million	Unspecified
	81 mm and 82 mm mortar rounds	769,000	USD 84.8 million	
	60 mm mortar rounds	249,000	USD 89.6 million	
	40 mm and 73 mm rocket-propelled or cartridge grenade rounds	3,768,000	USD 269.5 million	
	Total	4,974,000	USD 565.6 million	
Small arms ammunition and specialty munitions	Rounds of specialty 23×115 mm and .50 calibre ammunition	6,895,000	USD 38.3 million	1,537,000 rounds total (~1,167,000 rounds of small arms ammunition)
	Rounds of common small arms ammunition (such as 9 mm, 5.56 mm, 7.62 mm)	Millions	USD 3.19 billion	
	Total	–	USD 41.49 million	

Notes:

- a This figure is roughly consistent with the Taliban’s estimate of the numbers of small arms and light weapons it seized from the ANDSF. In February 2022, the head of the Taliban’s Ranks Clearance Commission told reporters that his group took possession of more than 300,000 ‘light arms’ in August 2021 (Al Jazeera, 2022).
- b These figures exclude 224 D-30 Howitzers listed in the original report because the Survey does not categorize Howitzers as small arms and light weapons, which are the focus of this paper.
- c Data was compiled from the Core Inventory Management System (CoreIMS) and unspecified ‘US DoD records’ and only includes US DoD-funded materiel procured through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programme, Pseudo-FMS cases, and the Excess Defense Articles programme (US DoD, 2022, p. 5).

Source: US DoD (2022)

‘ASFF-procured’ equipment, raising the question of whether the figures reflect US DoD purchases under all authorities or just under the ASFF (US DoD, 2022, p. 5).

The report also makes no mention of arms and ammunition exported by other US government agencies. While the materiel sourced from these programmes is likely a small fraction of items procured and transferred by the US DoD, their aggregate value is not insignificant. For example, the vehicles, weapons, and other assets supplied to

the Afghan government through the State Department’s Antiterrorism Assistance programme are estimated to cost between USD 28.2 and 32.2 million, according to the US SIGAR (US SIGAR, 2023a, p. 6). Given the low unit cost of small arms and light weapons, even a small percentage of this funding could procure hundreds of firearms.

Another notable information gap is on the serviceability of Afghan stocks.¹⁷ As the US DoD explicitly states in the report, it had little or no information on

the operational condition of the weapons it documented (US DoD, 2022, p. 7). In other words, the US DoD had no way of accurately estimating the percentage of weapons no longer functional due to issues such as neglect, damage sustained during combat, or a lack of spare parts.

Previous assessments of the functionality of Afghan stocks may provide some insight, but their veracity and applicability to the situation in August 2021 are difficult to determine. In 2014, for example, Afghan officials reported

that 20,606 of the ANA's 83,362 AK-pattern rifles were unserviceable and non-repairable. If the claim was accurate and the same conditions were applicable in mid-2021, roughly 60,000 of the reported 258,000 rifles in Afghan inventories when the Taliban took over may have been non-functional (US SIGAR, 2014, p. 11). The US SIGAR did not substantiate the Afghan officials' claim, however, and the officials may have exaggerated to obtain a larger number of replacement rifles. Without evidence to support the officials' claims, this data—and other anecdotal data on serviceability rates of equipment in Afghanistan during the US 'train and equip' programme—are of limited utility.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there are numerous concerns about the accuracy of the data used to generate the estimates in the US DoD's report. The authors of the report themselves conceded as much, warning that 'accuracy of CoreIMS is assessed as "LOW CONFIDENCE" and actual stock levels are further assessed to be lower than reflected' (US DoD, 2022, p. 13). The report does not identify the reasons for the low confidence assessment; however, it is likely due—at least in part—to the reported loss of data resulting from a CoreIMS server crash in early 2021, which 'resulted in the loss of inventory data after March 2021', according to the US DoD 2022 report. The US DoD's reliance on CoreIMS data is evidenced by the fact that, despite the crash, the system remained 'the sole source of the department's available data to assess remaining ANDSF stock levels' (US DoD, 2022, p. 13).

Other possible reasons for the low confidence assessment include the ad hoc and decentralized recordkeeping practices of the ANDSF and long-standing concerns about the completeness and accuracy of its data on Afghan inventories. As documented in multiple reports, establishing a centralized, digital inventory system via the adoption of the CoreIMS was slow and often limited to centralized storage facilities with the required staffing, equipment, and steady access to electrical power. Other storage facilities continued to rely on ad hoc practices involving handwritten records and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Consequently, US officials noted in a 2014 report that the data in CoreIMS 'is incomplete and cannot be relied upon for accurate information' (US SIGAR, 2014, p. 6). At least some of these problems persisted until the fall of the government.

“Effective post-shipment end-use monitoring requires complete, detailed, and accurate records of exported weapons.”

While noting an overall improvement in the implementation of CoreIMS,¹⁸ the US DoD Inspector General pointed out that implementation at the local level was far from complete as of August 2019. Specifically, the ANDSF was still not using CoreIMS to track weapons and other equipment at 78 of 191 local sites (US DoDIG, 2020, p. 9), meaning that, once weapons were distributed to roughly 40 per cent of local sites, centralized information on their status became extremely limited. Summarizing this mismatch between mission and tools, one former US government official observed that 'the Afghans did not have the technological infrastructure to sustain this process. We gave them a tool they could not use and then wonder[ed] why they could not account for their stuff.'¹⁹ These problems are noteworthy given the US DoD's reliance on CoreIMS for data on Afghan inventories at the time of the government's collapse.

US watchdog organizations also identified problems with the US DoD's databases on exported weapons. As previously mentioned, in a 2014 review of SCIP and OVERLORD, the US SIGAR's analysts 'identified missing, duplicate, and incomplete information within these two systems'. For example, the US SIGAR identified missing information and duplicative entries in records containing 203,888—or 43 per cent—of the 474,823 serial numbers recorded in OVERLORD. Similarly, the US SIGAR found 22,806 serial numbers in SCIP that were repeated two or three times (US SIGAR, 2014, p. 4). The US DoD took steps to clean up the data, but it is unclear if these efforts resulted in substantial, lasting improvements in the accuracy of the records in SCIP and OVERLORD.

The net result of the gaps, ambiguities, and errors in publicly available data on arms exports to Afghanistan is layer-upon-layer of uncertainty: uncertainty about the quantities, makes, and models of small arms and light weapons deliv-

ered to Afghanistan over the last 20 years; uncertainty about the location and security of these weapons while in the possession of the ANDSF; and uncertainty about the contents of depots and condition of the weapons when the Taliban seized them in 2021. The policy implications of this uncertainty are significant. Effective post-shipment end-use monitoring requires complete, detailed, and accurate records of exported weapons, including complete lists of serial numbers and up-to-date information on the location of the corresponding weapons. Without this data, systematically assessing the security of exported arms and the effectiveness of stockpile management practices prior to the government's collapse would have been—or was—extremely difficult, if not impossible, in some instances.

Similarly, tracing exported weapons captured, lost, or stolen and later recovered by Afghan or foreign authorities requires detailed, updated records of the weapons and their most recent authorized end users. Data gaps and errors like the ones identified by the US GAO, US SIGAR, and the US DoDIG reduce the likelihood of successfully tracing illicit weapons—including imported weapons—to their points of diversion. This tracing is essential for improving stockpile security, rooting out corruption, and reducing illicit arms flows.

The window for addressing problems with data collection and recordkeeping in Afghanistan has closed; US and NATO engagement with the Taliban is minimal, and there is little chance that Western officials will have significant influence over Afghan arsenals in the near future. But it is not too late for improving current importers' and exporters' data collection, storage, and reporting practices, especially for arms transfers through non-standard mechanisms to governments in armed conflict. These are some of the most difficult transfers to track and secure, and thus require

“The net result of the gaps, ambiguities, and errors in publicly available data on arms exports to Afghanistan is layer upon-layer of uncertainty.”

the most thorough oversight and careful planning. Addressing these issues now will help to prevent significant data problems during future international efforts to train and equip security forces in conflict areas quickly.

Conclusion

Mapping exports of small arms, light weapons, and ammunition to Afghanistan from 2002 to 2021 is an exceedingly complex task. National reporting on arms transfers has declined precipitously since its peak in the 2000s, and the data made publicly available is often vague, overly aggregated, and incomplete. Publicly available data on US-procured weapons is by far the most voluminous and detailed, but it also suffers from several significant shortcomings. Consequently, the various estimates of the total number of small arms and light weapons procured for and delivered to Afghanistan from 2002 to 2021 differ significantly from each other and change over time as the figures are revised to reflect the correction of errors and other changes. Available data does, however, shed some light on the types, models, and calibres of arms and ammunition incorporated into Afghan inventories over the past 20 years and the magnitude of the losses in materiel when the Taliban seized these inventories in August 2021.

The data also reveals the multinational nature of Afghan government—and now Taliban—inventories. While media coverage of the Taliban takeover usually focused on their newly acquired M4s and Humvees, available data suggests that the seized stocks are quite diverse. At least 30 states other than the US exported more than 300,000 small arms and light weapons to Afghanistan. Of these states, at least 12 transferred 10,000 or more

small arms and light weapons to Afghanistan, and three transferred more than 30,000 weapons. Given the holes in publicly available data on arms transfers, these figures are almost certainly underestimates.

Using official documentation, the Survey identified nearly 100 different models and patterns of small arms, light weapons, and light weapons ammunition exported to Afghanistan before 2021. This list includes mostly US-made weapons, reflecting the dearth of detailed information on non-US transfers. More detailed, disaggregated, and complete data on non-US sources of arms and ammunition—including makes and models not previously identified in public reporting mechanisms—would allow for a more complete baseline assessment of the deposed Afghan government’s inventories. Such a baseline would be useful for weapons identification, the monitoring of trends in arms trafficking to and from Afghanistan, and national and regional threat assessments, all of which are essential to preventing the widespread and perpetual circulation of the hundreds of thousands of weapons exported to Afghanistan over the past 20 years.

Better and more reliable data is also essential for proper stockpile management, post-shipment end-use monitoring, and weapons tracing—essential components of any effective small arms export control regime. While it is too late to turn things around in Afghanistan, the ANDSF was not the first armed force that the United States and its allies attempted to stand up in a hurry, and it will not be the last. Identifying and applying the many lessons about effective collection, storage, and dissemination of data on arms transfers in unconventional settings will help to ensure that future ‘train and equip’ programmes are more effective, transparent, and accountable. ●

Abbreviations and acronyms

ANA	Afghan national army
ANP	Afghan national police
ANDSF	Afghan national defence and security forces
ASFF	Afghanistan Security Forces Fund
CoreIMS	Core Inventory Management System
DSCA	Defense Security Cooperation Agency
EUR	Euro
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
FRAG	Fragmentation
GRND	Ground marker
HE	High explosives
HEDP	High explosives/dual purpose
Illum	Illumination
IR Illum	Infrared illumination
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OVERLORD	Operational Verification of Reliable Logistics Oversight Database
PRAC	Practice
PRCHT	Parachute
SCIP	Security Cooperation Information Portal
UN	United Nations
UNROCA	UN Register of Conventional Arms
US	United States
USD	United States dollar
US DoD	US Department of Defense
US DoDIG	US Department of Defense Inspector General
US FOIA	US Freedom of Information Act
US GAO	US Government Accountability Office
US SIGAR	US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
WP	White phosphorous

Notes

- 1 In its 2022 report, the US DoD repeatedly uses the term ‘remaining in Afghanistan’ but does not define it. Thus, it is unclear if the US DoD was referring only to arms and ammunition known to still be in the stocks of Afghan national defense and security forces (ANDSF) as of August 2021 or also to weapons already outside of ANDSF control when the Taliban seized power (US DoD, 2022).
- 2 The Survey’s categorization scheme is largely based on the United Nations’ definition of light weapons (see UNGA,

2005, p. 7). The one notable difference is that the Survey uses 120 mm as the calibre cut-off for mortar systems.

3 In US DoD Manual 4000.25-2-M, the US DoD defines *small arms* as handguns; shoulder-fired weapons; light automatic weapons up to and including .50-calibre machine guns; recoilless rifles, up to and including 106 mm; mortars up to and including 81 mm; rocket launchers, man-portable; grenade launchers, rifle and shoulder-fired; and individually operated weapons that are portable or can be fired without special mounts or firing devices and are vulnerable to theft. See US DoDIG (2012).

4 Less frequently, arms and other materiel were drawn directly from US government stocks, including through the US Excess Defense Articles programme.

5 A prominent example is a tweet sent by former President Donald Trump in August 2021 in which he conflated the value of security assistance allocated for Afghanistan with the value of equipment exported to Afghanistan: 'ALL EQUIPMENT should be demanded to be immediately returned to the United States, and that includes every penny of the USD 85 billion dollars in cost.' See Swenson (2021).

6 The data on the procurement and transfers of arms and ammunition for Afghanistan were in three main databases: the SCIP, the OVERLORD, and the Core Inventory Management System (CoreIMS). SCIP is a US DoD database for tracking US DoD-coordinated arms exports worldwide, including to Afghanistan. Data entered into SCIP includes case numbers, commodity descriptions, requisition numbers, shipping dates, and serial numbers for each weapon. When the weapons arrived in Afghanistan, comparable information was entered into OVERLORD, which is a database developed specifically to comply with registration and tracking requirements for small arms transferred to the Afghan government. CoreIMS is a digital inventory management system developed by the US company CorePartners, Inc. The US DoD set up CoreIMS in Afghanistan to transition the ANDSF and other Ministry of Defense offices from ad hoc, paper-based recordkeeping to a centralized, web-based inventory management system. As explained below, this goal was only partially realized. See US SIGAR (2014, p. 2) and CorePartners (n.d.).

7 See endnote 6 for an explanation of the differences between SCIP and OVERLORD.

8 Figure 1 shows the number of weapons authorized for procurement or transfer each year. As the US GAO (2017, p. 6) notes, the delay between authorization and delivery typically ranges from 40 days to three years, although the timeline can be shorter for programmes intended to build partner capacity like the Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF).

9 As explained by the US GAO (2017, p. 6), 'the data is broken out by the year in

which the US DoD authorized the equipment for procurement or transfer'.

10 See, for example, Mcleary and Hudson (2021) and Ali, Zengerle, and Landay (2021).

11 See Casalicchio (2021).

12 Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Portugal, and Serbia exported additional firearm-related items valued at EUR 2,872,973, for which no disaggregated data on quantities is available. Belgium issued licences for transfers worth an additional EUR 47,155. See Table 2.

13 As defined by the US GAO (2017, p. 13), 'NATO standard' refers to 'the NATO-approved standardization processes applied to equipment, which can include production codes and equipment specifications'.

14 The term Warsaw Pact weapons refers to weapons designed and manufactured in the former member states of the Warsaw Pact defence treaty: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Soviet Union.

15 See Schroeder (2018) for more information on sources of data for authorized small arms and light weapons transfers and their utility and limitations.

16 This total is based on a bar graph in a 2009 report by the US GAO. Since the exact totals are not presented in the report, the actual figure reported to the US GAO may be higher or lower. See Figure 1 in US GAO (2009, p. 7).

17 A former US military official familiar with Afghan accounting practices echoed this concern. 'The best datasets are what we transferred', noted the official. 'Where we are weakest—and what poses a challenge to analyse what the Taliban had access to—is where the equipment was in Afghanistan and the status of that equipment. Limited to no reporting was kept on how many rounds were used, how many weapons were inoperable, or what depot had what equipment, especially at the end as the ANDSF was rapidly moving equipment to the front lines.' Correspondence with former US government official, 31 August 2023.

18 In its 2020 report, the US DoDIG noted the results of comparing data on weapons and vehicles that had arrived in Afghanistan from 2016 to 2019, as recorded in CoreIMS, with data on exports over the same period in SCIP. The US DoDIG concluded that 'the Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan accurately recorded 98.2 per cent of weapon serial numbers and 95.4 per cent of vehicle serial numbers in CoreIMS' (US DoDIG, 2020, p. 9).

19 Correspondence with a former US government official, 31 August 2023.

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Contact details

Small Arms Survey
Maison de la Paix
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E
1202 Geneva
Switzerland

t +41 22 908 5777

e info@smallarmssurvey.org

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