

Wassenaar Arrangement, Members, Headquarters, History

August 12, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



Wassenaar Arrangement is a voluntary multilateral export control system designed to encourage accountability and openness. It aims to prevent destabilising accumulations and contribute to regional and global security and stability by encouraging more responsibility and transparency in the transfers of conventional weapons and dual-use products and technologies. Another goal of the Wassenaar Arrangement is to prevent terrorists from obtaining these items.

Through their national policies, participating states of the Wassenaar Arrangement aim to prevent transfers of these products from being diverted to bolster military capabilities that would undermine these objectives.

Wassenaar Arrangement History

Wassenaar Arrangement history traces back to the end of the **Cold War**, when the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM), with its East-West-focused export control structure, was considered outdated and replaced by a new multilateral arrangement.

- Its main goal was to promote regional and global security by addressing the proliferation threats related to conventional weapons and dual-use products and technologies.
- The process started on **November 16, 1993**, when the 17 COCOM member nations decided to disband COCOM and establish a new multilateral export control system in The Hague, Netherlands.
- At a high-level meeting in Wassenaar in March 1994, this decision was reiterated, and on **March 31, 1994**, **COCOM** formally ended operations.
- It was formally founded in Wassenaar, Netherlands, on December 19, 1995, and its secretariat is situated in Vienna, Austria, as one of the regimes of the **Multilateral Export Control Regime**.
- After its Initial Elements, Control Lists, and Information Exchange Mechanism were adopted, it went into operation in September 1996.

Wassenaar Arrangement Objectives

Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) objectives seek to promote responsible international trade in conventional arms and dual-use goods while preventing their misuse for military destabilisation or proliferation. Its major objectives are

- Promotes stability and security on a regional and global scale.
- Encourages greater accountability and openness in the transfer of dual-use goods and technologies as well as conventional weapons.
- Complements and reinforces existing export-control regimes for **Weapons of Mass Destruction** and their delivery systems.
- It is not directed against any state or groupings.
- Employs export restrictions to fight terrorism.

Wassenaar Arrangement Headquarters

The Wassenaar Arrangement does not have a permanent headquarters like the **United Nations**. It has a small Secretariat in Vienna, Austria, which facilitates contact between participating states, organises meetings, maintains official records, and offers administrative support.

Wassenaar Arrangement Members

Wassenaar Arrangement membership is assessed based on a state's ability and willingness to support the Arrangement's objectives.

- In 1996, the Wassenaar Arrangement came into effect with 33 founding member nations. The multilateral export control regime was developed by these initial participating states to keep an eye on dual-use technologies and conventional weapons.
- Key participating states include India, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, Australia, Italy, South Korea, Russia and the Netherlands.
- India became its 42nd member in December 2017.
- It does not include China as a participating state.

Wassenaar Arrangement Membership Eligibility

The eligibility assessment to add a new member considers its export capabilities, domestic controls, non-proliferation commitments and adherence to effective export-control practices, which are

- Whether it manufactures and exports industrial equipment or weapons, respectively;
- Whether it uses the Wassenaar Arrangement Control Lists as a guide for its domestic export regulations
- Its commitment to fully effective export controls.
- Its non-proliferation policies and relevant national policies, such as
 - Adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,
 - The Biological and Toxicological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention,
 - Adherence to non-proliferation policies,
 - Control lists, and, where applicable,
 - Guidelines of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, Zangger Committee, Missile Technology Control Regime and the Australia Group.

Wassenaar Arrangement Administration

Each participating state has the responsibility to decide whether to transfer any item or not. Every action about the Arrangement is carried out using national discretion and in compliance with national laws and rules.

- The Wassenaar Arrangement has set up its **Secretariat in Vienna**, where representatives of participating states convene on a regular basis.
- The Wassenaar Arrangement Plenary is the Arrangement's decision-making body. It meets once a year, typically in December, and is made up of delegates from each of the participating states.
 - Each year, the Plenary Chair position is rotated among the participating states. Every decision made in the Plenary is reached by consensus.

Wassenaar Arrangement Control List

Wassenaar Arrangement states have committed to upholding national export restrictions on goods listed in the Wassenaar Arrangement Control Lists. These controls are put into effect by national legislation and are governed by established best practices, guidelines, or elements.

- They have committed to reporting on the transfer and denial of specific controlled items to locations outside the Arrangement, and they share information on sensitive dual-use products and technologies.
- The Arrangement maintains **two principal control lists** that participating governments incorporate into their national export control systems.
- **Munitions list:** The Munitions List contains 22 categories/items covering conventional military equipment and specially designed components, some of which fall under the following categories
 - Tanks and other military-armed vehicles; aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles; armoured and protective equipment; small arms and light weapons (and related ammunition); aero engines and related equipment.
- **List of Dual-Use Goods and Technologies:** Products, software, and technology that have valid civilian uses but can also be modified for military use.
- Key classifications consist of

- General Technology and General Software Notes
- **Category 1** – Special Materials and Related Equipment
- **Category 2** – Material Processing
- **Category 3** – Electronics
- **Category 4** – Computers
- **Category 5** – Part 1 – Telecommunications
- **Category 5** – Part 2 – Information Security
- **Category 6** – Sensors and Lasers
- **Category 7** – Navigation and Avionics
- **Category 8** – Marine
- **Category 9** – Aerospace and Propulsion
- The list also distinguishes between **Basic**, **Sensitive**, and **Very Sensitive** technologies, with stricter controls applied to higher-risk items.

Wassenaar Arrangement and India

Wassenaar Arrangement membership has strengthened India's participation in global export-control and non-proliferation efforts. Since joining the Arrangement, India has actively engaged in its processes while aligning its national export-control framework with relevant Wassenaar control lists.

- The Wassenaar Arrangement's technical knowledge is provided by a number of Indian ministries and departments.
- India's national single export control list, Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies (SCOMET), which is revised yearly, incorporates the Wassenaar Arrangement Control Lists.

Wassenaar Arrangement Significance for India

The significance of the Wassenaar Arrangement for India extends beyond export controls, supporting India's integration into global technology and defence supply chains. Its membership also strengthens international confidence in India's responsible handling of sensitive dual-use goods and technologies.

- **Availability of Advanced Technologies:** Membership fosters collaboration in cutting-edge dual-use technology by boosting worldwide trust in India's export control system.
 - However, as exports are still governed by the national laws and licensing regulations of source nations, it does not automatically ensure access to sensitive technologies.
- **Enhanced Manufacturing for Defence:** By promoting ethical technology alliances, participation aids India's defence modernisation and enhances programmes like Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- **Increased International Credibility:** Membership upholds India's reputation as a responsible participant in international non-proliferation and acknowledges its strong export control system.
- **Enhanced Export Prospects:** Increased international trust and better opportunities for cooperation with participating governments are advantages for Indian firms working with controlled dual-use technologies.
- **Increased Involvement in Rule-Making:** In contrast to prior to 2017, India now actively contributes to talks regarding the updating of control lists and the development of future export control standards.

- **Assistance with Strategic Goals:** In addition to aiding India's larger goal of joining the **Nuclear Suppliers Group** (NSG), membership enhanced India's standing within the international export control framework and complemented its admission to the MTCR and Australia Group.

Wassenaar Arrangement UPSC PYQs

Q1. Recently, the USA decided to support India's membership in multilateral export control regimes called the "Australia Group" and the "Wassenaar Arrangement". What is the difference between them? **(UPSC Prelims 2011)**

1. The Australia Group is an informal arrangement which aims to allow exporting countries to minimise the risk of assisting chemical and biological weapons proliferation, whereas the Wassenaar Arrangement is a formal group under the OECD holding identical objectives.
2. The Australia Group comprises predominantly Asian, African, and North American countries, whereas the member countries of Wassenaar Arrangement are predominantly from the **European Union** and American continents.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (d)

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/wassenaar-arrangement/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.