The Armed Conflict Database (ACD)*

http://acd.iiss.org

Being a “newbie” when it comes to reviewing database packages, I’ve decided to approach the task as if I had been given the opportunity to add a resource to reinvigorate a (dare I say) tired Library’s offerings. With this noble aim in mind, I turned my attention to evaluating the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Armed Conflict Database (ACD).

On reflection, I guess it was a tad cheeky; however, prior to evaluating the ACD and to get an overview from the IISS perspective as to the mechanisms in place to produce such an offering, I adopted the role of “mystery shopper”. I emailed the IISS asking: “Without wishing to compromise/divulge your sources, I would be very interested to know from where the database research information is compiled and how the integrity of the database is maintained”. My subterfuge paid dividends... I was greatly impressed by the exceptionally quick and very helpful response received from Hanna Ucko Neill, Global Conflicts Analyst; ACD Coordinator. I hope I’m forgiven, when I quote Hanna verbatim: “The Armed Conflict Database is a research tool which is updated weekly, monthly and annually. Its data and analysis is based on open source information and all events are corroborated with at least two other sources. The research assistants make use of their academic, professional and linguistic expertise and they also benefit from the expertise within the Institute membership and the many formal and informal seminars and workshops that take place in the building”.

Armed with insider knowledge, I discovered the ACD provided unbiased analysis via its on screen introduction. The subsequent navigation of the database headings: World Map, Conflict List, Region List, Non State Armed Groups, Definitions, Statistics and Interactive Service together with the viewing of pertinent information could not have been easier; surely satisfying the most jaded researcher palate. To maximise research capabilities, I would recommend users accustom themselves to a brief on content and navigation found under the introduction heading. I was soon clicking around the World Map and moving through the various layers of country and regional data. The latest timelines, background, links, political trends, military, security and human security, are all concisely presented, as well as the ability of clicking directly to select conflict mode.

Viewing country fact boxes/producing reports and analysis via the statistics tab on the menu bar was unbelievably quick and hassle free. This was ideal for those of a selective, discerning nature, given the very intuitive tick box screen. Admitting to being a “lite” ACD user; I managed to pull up/drop down investigative information on non state, state parties, terrorism, fatalities, weapons, refugees and returnees. On closer inspection, further layers attracted my attention to the dynamics of human geography, for example, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) (found under the definitions heading) which via an embedded web link, took me to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website. As per the well-worn phrase - “beginner, intermediate or advanced”; to truly appreciate and export the ACD’s capabilities, the definitions tab was invaluable, guiding me through the various available options covering: Categories of armed conflict, time period, political status, fatalities, refugees, returnees and IDPS, weapons, attributions and acknowledgements. So as not
to accidentally omit any search parameters, I recommend familiarisation with the definitions heading before launching into full search mode. Reports can be generated back to 1997 together with their correlation from various years, conflicts, regions and topics. The database includes yearly conflict reports from 2000 onwards, available in bar, line, table or pie chart format with linkage afforded to IISS publications and other supporting documentation. Report templates for troop numbers, IDPS and political status are to be added shortly.

I hope to have coherently shown how an impartial database can be manipulated in a variety of ways to achieve desired results; therefore I thoroughly endorse the ACD. Data may be used if cited as sourced from the IISS within published works. Please be aware how guidance must be sought from the Institute for all reproduced text. To conclude; this is a very clever, continually updated and worthy research tool, either as a stand alone point of reference or in conjunction with other databases covering conflict and terrorism in the world.

* To register for a free trial to the Armed Conflict Database, for pricing information, or to subscribe, please contact us at:

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