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CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS: EXPORTING SECURITY OR ARMING ADVERSARIES?

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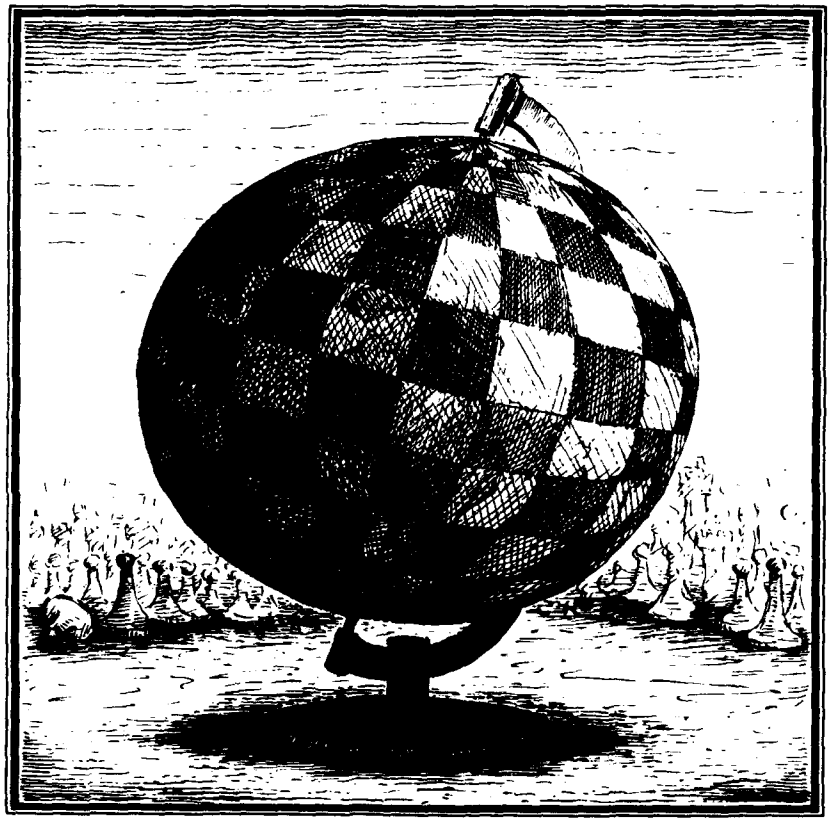

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CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS: EXPORTING SECURITY OR ARMING ADVERSARIES?

Michael T. Klare

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FOREWORD

In this study, Michael Klare examines the dichotomy in the U.S. response to conventional and unconventional arms proliferation. With the end of the cold war, however, this has begun to change. While the spread of NBC munitions continues to be seen as an especially significant peril, many policymakers now view conventional arms transfers as a similar problem, with a comparable requirement for international controls.

But a consistent policy and strategy has been difficult to develop because of competing pressures and demands: on one hand, there is pressure to follow through on pledges to establish international controls on conventional arms traffic; on the other, is pressure to preserve long-standing military relationships with friendly foreign governments. The author maintains that the United States cannot pursue both objectives and expect to accomplish its stated policy goals of regional stability in a world where loyalties and alliances are breaking down and in which every nation is scrambling to advance its own national interests. He concludes that in today's uncertain and chaotic world, it is safer to view most arms transfers as a potential proliferation risk rather than as an assured asset for U.S. national security.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to publish this report as part of the debate on national military strategy.

Karl W. Robinson

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CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS: EXPORTING SECURITY OR ARMING ADVERSARIES?

For most of the cold war era, U.S. policymakers generally viewed conventional arms transfers as a separate issue from that of nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons proliferation. Thus, while the United States has signed or endorsed a number of international curbs on the spread of unconventional weapons, including the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), and the proposed Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), it has rarely supported such efforts in the conventional area. This dichotomy is also reflected in the organization of the U.S. Government with respect to proliferation affairs: whereas various laws and regulations prohibit the export of nuclear and chemical weapons, U.S. law (notably the Arms Export Control Act of 1976) provides for the lawful export of conventional weapons, and several government agencies, including the Defense Security Assistance Agency (DSAA) and the State Department's Office of Defense Trade, are directly or indirectly involved in the actual transfer of such munitions.

This dichotomy in the U.S. response to conventional and unconventional arms proliferation reflects the widespread belief that NBC proliferation is inherently destabilizing, no matter who the recipient might be, while transfers of conventional arms can enhance stability if provided to friendly powers. Specifically, U.S. policymakers have long maintained that arms transfers to key friends and allies in the Third World can enhance stability in vital areas (especially the Middle East) by deterring aggression by Soviet-backed regional powers. In articulating this point, Under Secretary of State James L. Buckley told an industry group in 1981 that the Reagan Administration "believes that arms transfers, judiciously applied, can complement and supplement our own defense

efforts and serve as a vital and constructive instrument of our foreign policy."[1] On this basis, a succession of American presidents have approved substantial deliveries of U.S. arms and military equipment to friendly nations in the Third World.[2]

With the end of the cold war, however, the long-standing dichotomy in U.S. responses to conventional and unconventional proliferation has begun to disappear. While the spread of NBC munitions continues to be seen as an especially significant peril, requiring stepped-up nonproliferation efforts, many policymakers now view conventional arms trafficking as a similar problem, with a comparable requirement for international controls. This new assessment of conventional arms is partly due to the greater sophistication of arms sold on the international market, and partly to a perception that arms transfers have fueled regional conflicts in areas of tension. An important case in point was the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88, which killed an estimated one million people and jeopardized the strategic interests of the United States (namely, safe access to Persian Gulf petroleum supplies). The Iran-Iraq War also focused attention on the proliferation of ballistic missiles, used by both sides to attack cities and industrial zones. In the wake of the war, many world leaders called for fresh initiatives to curb the spread of sophisticated weapons to areas of conflict.

This new perception of the risks attendant upon the uncontrolled spread of advanced conventional weapons also began to appear in the security assessments of U.S. military leaders. Here, for instance, is former Army Chief of Staff General Carl E. Vuono, writing in the April 1990 issue of *Sea Power* magazine:

> The proliferation of military power in what is often called the 'Third World' presents a troubling picture. Many Third World nations now possess mounting arsenals of tanks, heavy artillery, ballistic missiles, and chemical weapons. At least a dozen developing countries have more than 1,000 main battle tanks, and portable antiaircraft and antitank missiles are widespread as well.

Regional rivalries supported by powerful armies have resulted in brutal and devastating conflicts in the Third World.

We need look no further than the Iran-Iraq War to see the effects of weapons and technologies formerly reserved only for the superpowers. The proliferation of advanced military capabilities has given an increasing number of countries in the developing world the ability to wage sustained, mechanized land warfare. The United States cannot ignore the expanding military power of these countries, and the Army must retain the capability to defeat threats wherever they occur. This could mean confronting a well-equipped army in the Third World.[3]

When compared to similar statements by U.S. military officials during peak cold war periods, Vuono's comments strike one as a sharp departure from prior practice. Rather than focus specifically on Soviet arms transfers to particular Soviet clients in the Third World, as had been the standard practice in previous years, Vuono depicts weapons proliferation as a *generalized* problem, irrespective of the source of the weapons. In addition, he suggests that such proliferation can fuel regional conflicts that are independent of the old U.S.-Soviet rivalry, but that nevertheless threaten vital U.S. interests–thus sparking possible U.S. intervention. This represents a relatively new theme in U.S. security thinking, and one that has gained increasing prominence during the past few years.

In recognition of the threat posed by the uncontrolled commerce in conventional arms, U.S. policymakers began to view such traffic as both a legitimate and an important concern for arms control. A significant milestone in this regard was the adoption of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in 1987, the first multilateral measure of this sort to address the spread of non-NBC weapons. While the focus on ballistic missiles was partly spurred by fears that they would be used for the delivery of NBC munitions, advocates of the MTCR also cited the dangers posed by their use in delivering conventional warheads. The United States also agreed in 1988 to participate in a UN-mandated study of the role of transparency in constraining conventional arms transfers.

So, even without the outbreak of the Persian Gulf crisis, it is likely that conventional arms transfers would come under increasing scrutiny by the United States and other countries in

the post-cold war era. Whether or not this would have led eventually to a fundamental change in U.S. arms export policy cannot, of course, be stated with any certainty. Once the crisis did break out, however, the arms trade issue received more attention than ever before and moved quickly to the top of the U.S. policy agenda.

The Persian Gulf crisis lent fresh importance to the arms trade issue for several reasons. First, the crisis itself can be attributed in part to uncontrolled arms transfers. In making the decision to occupy Kuwait, Saddam Hussein clearly believed that his powerful armies–equipped with large supplies of imported arms–would prove sufficiently menacing to deter any countermoves by unfriendly powers. Later, when it became evident that such countermoves were indeed possible, he refused to quit Kuwait in the apparent belief that his well-equipped forces would prevail in combat, or at least would inflict such heavy casualties on the coalition forces that they would agree to settle the conflict on terms favorable to Iraq. It can also be argued that the willingness of so many countries (including close allies of the United States) to supply Iraq with so many sophisticated arms–*despite* Baghdad's record of aggression and its use of chemical weapons against civilians–could have encouraged Hussein to believe that the major powers had no fundamental objection to his hegemonic aspirations.

Second, the Persian Gulf war clearly demonstrated how the proliferation of sophisticated conventional arms has upped the risks for participation in regional conflicts of this sort. While it is true that the United States suffered very few casualties during the course of the war, it must be also be recalled that U.S. strategists felt compelled to deploy the most powerful expeditionary force assembled since World War II to defeat Hussein's well-equipped armies. As it turned out, U.S. weaponry generally proved superior to the Soviet, French, and other European munitions in Iraqi hands; but the gap in technology was not all that great, and if Iraqi soldiers had been more adept in the use of their weapons they undoubtedly would have taken a much higher toll in allied lives. In future conflicts, where the technology on each side is roughly comparable and

where the gap in skills, training, and doctrine is not as great as that experienced in the Gulf war, we are likely to witness much higher levels of death and destruction on all sides.

Finally, the Gulf conflict clearly demonstrated that the Iraq/Kuwait theater is but a part of the larger fabric of Middle Eastern conflicts and rivalries–all of which must be addressed if lasting peace and stability are to be established in the region. Both sides in the Gulf conflict sought to turn this reality to their advantage: Iraq by targeting Israel and Saudi Arabia with ballistic missiles, and by appealing to disaffected Arab masses, the United States by inviting Syria and Egypt to support the anti-Iraqi coalition. At the conclusion of the war, U.S. efforts to promote long-term stability in the Gulf area inevitably extended to the attempted resolution of other regional disputes. In addressing these disputes, moreover, U.S. policymakers have discovered how deeply proliferation issues are embedded in the regional security dilemma–for so long as the major actors believe that the acquisition of enhanced arms capabilities will invest them with a military advantage over any rivals, they will likely eschew a negotiated settlement of outstanding issues. Only by curbing arms deliveries to the region, it now appears, can the United States persuade these actors that they have nothing to gain by continued intransigence at the bargaining table.

For all of these reasons, control of the conventional arms trade became a major U.S. and international priority in the wake of the Persian Gulf conflict. Thus, on February 6, 1991, Secretary of State James Baker told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the establishment of such controls would be one of the primary U.S. foreign policy objectives in the post-conflict period. "The time has come," he affirmed, "to try to change the destructive pattern of military competition and proliferation in [the Middle East] and to reduce the arms flow into an area that is already over-militarized."[4] President Bush also spoke of the need for arms transfer restraints, and returned to this point in his first formal press conference after the war's conclusion. "I will work very hard for peace, just as hard as I have in the prosecution of war," he declared on March 1, 1991. Curbing the spread of nuclear and chemical weapons

would be the top priority, he noted, "but let's hope that out of all this there will be less proliferation of all different types of weapons, not just unconventional weapons."[5]

In the weeks that followed, conventional arms transfer restraint became a major topic in Congress, with many lawmakers calling for the adoption of new legislative restrictions on foreign military sales. Characteristic of this outlook is a March 1991 speech by Senator Joseph Biden. "The window of opportunity for Middle East arms control is now open," he told colleagues in the Senate. "Before it begins to shut, we must apply the same diplomatic skill and ingenuity to arms control that we brought to reversing Saddam's aggression against Kuwait, lest some future dictator, armed with Western technology, again unleash the dogs of war in the cauldron we call the Middle East."[6] Along with other members of Congress, Biden called for a moratorium on U.S. arms transfers to the Middle East pending multilateral talks aimed at the adoption of international constraints on military exports to the region.[7]

In response to such efforts, and to similar calls from leaders of other friendly nations, President Bush on May 29, 1991, announced a "Middle East Arms Control Initiative" aimed at curbing the spread of nuclear arms, chemical munitions, ballistic missiles, and "destabilizing" conventional weapons. As part of this effort, Bush called for meetings with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the "Perm Five") to consider the adoption mutual "guidelines" for the control of foreign military sales. As envisioned by Bush, the guidelines would oblige the major suppliers "to observe a general code of responsible arms transfers" and "to avoid destabilizing transfers."[8]

Bush's proposal for a meeting of major military suppliers was accepted by the other nations involved, and, on July 8 and 9, representatives of the Perm Five met in Paris to discuss this and other measures for conventional arms transfer restraint. In a communique issued at the conclusion of this meeting, the participating officials declared that "They recognized that indiscriminate transfers of military weapons and technology contribute to regional instability." Moreover, "They are fully

conscious of the special responsibilities that are incumbent upon them [as major military suppliers] to ensure that such risks be avoided, and of the special role they have to play in promoting greater responsibility, confidence and transparency in this field."[9] In line with this view, the Perm Five called for further talks leading to the adoption of specific control measures.

Although phrased in polite diplomatic terms, and requiring little in the way of specific actions, this statement represents something of a sea-change in the attitude of the international community with respect to conventional arms transfers. Until very recently, conventional arms control had not been viewed as a legitimate function of global nonproliferation efforts, and individual suppliers generally contended that international law and practice allowed them to export such items free of international restrictions. Now, however, the major suppliers acknowledged that they bore "special responsibilities" to impose constraints on the conventional arms traffic.

In consonance with this outlook, representatives of the Perm Five continued to meet over the summer and early fall and, at a meeting in London on October 17-18, 1991, adopted a set of formal guidelines for the control of conventional arms transfers. In signing the London document, the Perm Five promised to consult with one another regarding the flow of arms to particular regions and to "observe rules of restraint" when deciding on major arms export transactions. They further pledged to avoid arms transfers that would be likely to:

- prolong or aggravate an existing armed conflict;
- increase tension in a region or contribute to regional instability;
- introduce destabilizing military capabilities in a region;
- contravene embargoes or other relevant internationally agreed restraints to which they are parties;
- be used other than for the legitimate defense and security needs of the recipient state.

In addition, the Perm Five affirmed their support for the establishment, under UN supervision, of an annual "register" of conventional arms transfers.[10]

The adoption of these guidelines by the United States suggests a strong commitment to the principle of conventional arms transfer restraint. If followed up with other measures, including the UN register (approved by the United Nations on December 9, 1991), the London guidelines could provide the foundation for an international arms transfer control regime akin to the existing regimes for control of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and ballistic missile technology.[11]

Clearly, then, there is strong support in the United States and elsewhere for the adoption of multilateral controls on conventional arms transfers, reflecting the belief that uncontrolled transfers–irrespective of the supplier and recipients involved–pose a significant threat to international peace and stability. It is important to note, however, that many American policymakers continue to adhere to the more traditional view that conventional arms transfers by the United States to friendly powers abroad greatly contribute to U.S. security and thus should be sheltered from international restraints.

This traditional view can be found in statements by a number of senior U.S. officials from the spring and summer of 1991, when the issue of arms transfer restraint was gaining such visibility in Washington. Thus, in response to queries from members of Congress regarding the value of such constraints, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney remarked on March 19 that while he might be willing to consider some sort of arms transfer controls, "I think our first concern ought to be to work with our friends and allies to see to it that they're secure."[12] A similar outlook was expressed at the time by Richard N. Haass, the senior analyst for Near East affairs on the National Security Council, at a meeting of arms control specialists. "One should not get overly optimistic or idealistic about [conventional] arms control," he noted. "Conventional arms controls may tend to lock you in, and you may not want to be locked in, because the situation is fast evolving...and we are not neutral. There are

some [Middle Eastern] countries we are closer to than others."[13]

This perspective continued to influence U.S. arms export policy even after the announcement of the President's Middle East Arms Control Initiative on May 29, 1991. Thus, on June 4, Cheney told reporters accompanying him on a trip to the Middle East that the United States would continue to satisfy requests from friends and allies in the region for access to advanced U.S. military equipment. "We simply can't fall into the trap of [saying] that arms control means we don't provide any arms to the Middle East," he noted. "That is not what we recommend...[and] it would be an unwise policy."[14] On this basis, the Bush Administration approved some $18 billion worth of arms transfers to Third World countries in 1991, and additional transfers are expected to be announced in the months ahead.[15]

In justifying these sales, U.S. officials argue that there is no contradiction between continuing transfers to friendly powers and the pursuit of multilateral arms restraint. "We do not believe that arms sales are necessarily destabilizing," Under Secretary of State Reginald Bartholomew told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on June 6, 1991. Rather, such transfers can strengthen stability by enhancing the defensive capabilities of friendly nations. "That is why," he argued, "it is in no way a contradiction for the United States to be simultaneously seeking an arms transfer regime with the other major suppliers and continuing to supply arms needed by peaceful states to defend themselves against aggressors."[16]

This, in essence, constitutes the core of the administration's current position on conventional arms transfers: pursue moderate restraints at the international level, while continuing to satisfy the military requirements of key allies and clients in the Third World. It is a position that appears to satisfy competing pressures and demands: on one hand, the pressure to follow through on pledges to establish international controls on arms trafficking; on the other, the pressure to preserve long-standing military relationships with friendly foreign governments. But while a compromise position of this sort is undoubtedly attractive to senior U.S.

policymakers, it is not a stance that can be sustained indefinitely. Given the multiplicity of suppliers in the conventional arms marketplace and the strong economic pressures to sell now being experienced by many of these countries (in response to a decline in domestic military spending), any evidence of U.S. permissiveness regarding military sales to America's clients and allies will inevitably be seen by other suppliers as justification for increased military sales to *their* clients and allies, thereby stimulating local arms races and undermining the incipient nonproliferation regime established in London. A rigorous nonproliferation stance, on the other hand, would require greater U.S. resistance to appeals from friendly governments for access to sophisticated U.S. arms. It would also require others not to exploit U.S. restraint by rushing into new markets.

This dilemma is readily apparent to arms control experts and to many in Congress. Thus, in response to an earlier administration announcement regarding military sales to Egypt, Senator Biden observed in March that "our signals have become muddled. One day we promote the idea of Middle East arms control, the next day we step back; one day we promote a postwar order based on security with fewer weapons, and the next day the State Department notifies Congress of its intent to sell 46 F-16s to Egypt...." Noting that other suppliers are ready and eager to increase their own sales to the region, Biden suggested that "the message [the F-16 sale] will send–both to other supplier nations and to nations in the region–will be this: the Middle East arms bazaar is once again open and ready for business."[17]

At this point, it appears that Biden's prediction is largely on the mark: while it might be argued that the Middle East arms bazaar would be even more raucous in the absence of U.S. nonproliferation efforts, there is no doubt that the major states of the region (excluding Iraq) are enjoying a buyer's market in their pursuit of high-tech weapons. A recent report conducted by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), at the request of Senator John McCain, on *Arms Sales to the Middle East Since the Gulf War*, shows substantial deliveries of sophisticated arms to such states as Egypt, Iran, Israel,

Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE); the principal suppliers named in the report include all five permanent members of the UN Security Council–the very countries that signed the London accords in October. "The key message [of the report]," Senator McCain concluded, "is that the threat to the Middle East is not over."[18]

It is evident, therefore, that despite the administration's efforts to balance competing demands, there will be a growing contradiction between selling arms to allies and pursuing multilateral constraints on arms transfers. The United States cannot pursue both objectives and expect to accomplish its stated policy goals. We must determine which approach best serves America's long-term security interests–and that means weighing the advantages and disadvantages of both.

The arguments in favor of the traditional approach are well known.[19] By strengthening the defensive capabilities of America's exposed friends and allies, we help to deter attacks on them by aspiring regional hegemons, and diminish the likelihood that American forces will be required to repel such aggression in the event that deterrence fails. In justifying a 1986 arms shipment to Saudi Arabia, for instance, the State Department argued that "our willingness to support Saudi self-defense has served as a deterrent to Iran," then viewed as the major threat to stability in the Gulf. Moreover, "it will also reduce the chances that we would have to take emergency action later to protect our own interests."[20]

A new wrinkle has been added to this argument following the failure of the U.S.-supplied Kuwaiti army to provide much resistance to invading Iraqi forces, and the subsequent failure of the U.S.-supplied Saudi army to defend its territory on its own. While it may not be possible to avert future U.S. interventions in the region, the argument now goes, arms transfers can help local states to defend themselves *long enough* to allow U.S. reinforcements to be flown in from afar, rather than from bases immediately in the region. "The policy which we're pursuing now [in the Gulf area] is one in which we want to minimize the U.S. military presence on the ground in the region," Secretary Cheney told the House Foreign Affairs

Committee on March 19, 1991. "It's probably easier to do [this] if we help our friends like the Saudis and the Gulf states have sufficient capability to be able to defend themselves long enough for us to be able to get back."[21]

And, should such action again prove necessary, a history of U.S. arms transfers to friends in the region will supposedly contribute to the smooth functioning of combined staffs and to the interoperability of equipment in U.S. and allied hands. "Much of our success in Desert Storm can be directly attributed to the close defense and military-to-military relationships we have developed with regional states over the last several decades," Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Arthur H. Hughes told a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee in March 1991. "These programs also provided the basis for the rapid integration of forces."[22]

These arguments have a certain amount of merit, and were largely successful during the cold war period in convincing Congress to support U.S. arms transfers to friendly nations in the Third World. But a policy that may have made sense in the bipolar world of the cold war era does not necessarily make sense in the multipolar world of the post-cold war era–a world in which long-standing loyalties and alliances are breaking down and in which every nation is scrambling to advance its own national interests. A sobering picture of this world was provided in the U.S. Army "Posture Statement" for Fiscal Year 1991:

> The United States faces as complex and varied a security environment as it enters the 1990s as at any time in its history. The world economy is becoming more integrated and new centers of influence are developing. The increased lethality of weaponry, and the proliferation of force in the developing world make regional conflicts more rather than less likely. Allies are becoming more assertive in pursuing their own interests and are less apt to follow the lead of a superpower. (p.I-1)

If this is an accurate picture of the post-cold war world, and I believe that it is, we must ask whether it still makes sense to continue arming friendly Third World powers in the belief that American interests will be well served thereby–or do we

conclude instead that further U.S. arms transfers will simply add to the picture of instability sketched out in the Army report.

I believe that there *are* situations in which timely deliveries of purely defensive systems like the Patriot missile can contribute to regional stability. But these situations are rare. In most cases, U.S. deliveries to a given power in a region will only fuel the insecurities of neighboring powers–which may have sound historical reasons to question the intentions of the original recipient–thus provoking additional arms transfers into the region and placing the original country at greater rather than lesser risk. "The Bush Administration is correct in saying that the nations in the region have legitimate security concerns," former ACDA Director Paul C. Warnke told the Permanent Senate Subcommittee on Investigations in June 1991; "however, their security interests are only made more precarious as the region becomes further laden with sophisticated conventional armaments."[23]

It is also risky, as repeatedly demonstrated by events in the Middle East, to assume that today's friendly regime will remain friendly in the future, or that it will successfully resist efforts by hostile political factions to replace it. The United States had no objection to French sales of sophisticated weapons to Saddam Hussein when he was viewed in Washington as a quasi-ally in the struggle against revolutionary Iran; now, only 5 years later, he is our sworn enemy. Similarly, the United States poured billions of dollars' worth of sophisticated arms into Iran when we thought that the reign of the Shah would last forever; today, those same weapons (or at least those for which the Iranians have been able to obtain spare parts) are being used by the Shah's revolutionary successors to threaten stability in the Gulf area. "Plausible strategic justifications are of course offered for each sale to friendly recipients in the Third World," Edward Luttwak noted in November 1990, "but these are worthless when the recipients are fragile autocracies whose policies can change overnight."[24]

Nor can we have any confidence that substantial U.S. arms transfers to threatened allies will significantly reduce the need for U.S. intervention, should a key ally come under attack. "The Gulf War proved that, no matter how well [America's allies] are

armed, the United States still is the ultimate guarantor of their security," Warnke testified in 1991. "We simply cannot arm Saudi Arabia or Israel or Egypt enough to ensure their physical safety, especially if we are arming their neighbors as well."[25]

Looking at the other side of the equation, it can be argued that rigorous international controls on the transfer of advanced conventional weapons would prove a real asset to U.S. security in the emerging post-cold war era. Such controls, consisting of a system of reporting requirements ("transparency"), technology controls (on the model of the MTCR), and supplier restraints,[26] would enhance U.S. security in several ways:

- *First, by preventing the rise of another heavily-armed regional superpower like Saddam Hussein's Iraq.* A transparency system, based on the soon-to-be-established UN arms trade register, can provide early warning of major arms acquisitions efforts by aspiring regional powers; supplier restraints could then ensure that such efforts are curtailed before the recipient in question assembles a significant offensive capability. As suggested by the G-7 governments at the London Economic Summit of July 1991, "a register would alert the international community to an attempt by a state to build up holdings of conventional arms beyond a reasonable level." Once so alerted, the major suppliers could then "take steps to prevent the building up of disproportionate arsenals," notably by imposing mutual restraints on arms transfers "to countries and areas of particular concern."[27]

- *Second, by moderating local arms races in areas of tension, and prompting local states in these areas to pursue regional arms control and security pacts designed to minimize the risk of conflict.* So long as regional powers believe that they can gain a military advantage over their neighbors through further acquisitions of advanced munitions, they will be disinclined to sit down with one another and adopt mutual restraints on regional arms levels; once the prospect of such acquisitions is foreclosed, however,

they will have a much greater incentive to negotiate such restraints. It is on this basis, indeed, that many members of Congress last year supported a moratorium on arms sales to the Middle East. Such a moratorium, Rep. Dante B. Fascell told President Bush in April 1991, "can be used effectively to bring supplier nations and regional states together to pursue a range of arms reduction and arms control proposals."[28]

- *Third, by diminishing the risk that U.S. and friendly forces committed to future peacekeeping or contingency operations abroad will be attacked with large numbers of sophisticated conventional weapons.* This risk was particularly acute in the Persian Gulf conflict, and this, in turn, helps explain the upsurge in interest among the major powers in conventional arms control. "Although it should be obvious," Janne E. Nolan of the Brookings Institution wrote recently, "it perhaps needs to be reiterated that countries have abided by export restraints in the past [such as the MTCR] because of an interest in containing military developments in areas in which their own forces might be placed at risk."[29]

Given this assessment, it would appear that America's security interests–and those of our allies–can best be secured by constraining the flow of conventional arms to areas of conflict, and by persuading the nations of the area to join in regional peace talks aimed at reducing regional tensions and lowering the levels of regional arsenals. This assessment has, in fact, been written into U.S. law: As stated in the introduction (Section 401) to Title IV of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1992 and 1993, "future security and stability in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region would be enhanced by establishing a stable military balance among regional powers by restraining and reducing both conventional and unconventional weapons."[30] On this basis, the Act calls upon the Executive Branch to work with other arms suppliers to establish a multilateral arms transfer control regime similar

to those now covering exports of nuclear, chemical, and missile technology (Section 402).

I believe that a careful assessment of the validity of the two main approaches to conventional arms transfers will lead inescapably to the conclusion that, in today's uncertain and chaotic world, it is safer to view most arms transfers as a potential proliferation risk rather than as an assured asset for U.S. national security. When it can unambiguously be shown that a particular delivery of defensive equipment will eliminate a clear and present danger from a potential aggressor, and when all political and diplomatic efforts have failed to eliminate the particular danger, then the transfer should be allowed to proceed. But our priority as a nation should be to pursue the establishment of an arms transfer control regime like that envisioned in Section 402 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, and accelerate the efforts initiated by Secretary Baker to promote a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East.

ENDNOTES

1. Address at Aerospace Industries Association, Williamsburg, VA, May 21, 1981 (Department of State transcript).

2. For an analysis of presidential policy on conventional arms exports from Kennedy to Reagan, see Klare, *American Arms Supermarket*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984, pp. 39-53.

3. Carl E. Vuono, "Versatile, Deployable, and Lethal: The Strategic Army in the 1990s and Beyond," *Sea Power*, April 1990, pp. 59, 61.

4. Statement by James Baker before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington, DC, February 6, 1991 (Department of State text).

5. From the transcript of Bush's remarks in *The New York Times*, March 2, 1991.

6. "Window of Opportunity for Middle East Arms Control," *Congressional Record*, Vol. 137, No. 43, March 13, 1991. For a similar view, see Lee H. Hamilton, "Middle East Arms Restraint: An Obligation to Act," *Arms Control Today*, June 1991, pp. 17-20.

7. For a summary of congressional initiatives in this area, see *Arms Control Today*, June 1991, pp. 18-19.

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