
Legislators Seek a Re-evaluation of U.S. Arms Transfer Policy

[The following is a copy of a Congressional letter sent to President William J. Clinton on 30 July 1993. The letter carries the signatures of 111 members of the House of Representatives, and asks the President to develop a new multilateral arms transfer policy which will increase restraints on the transfer abroad of U.S. conventional weapons. The last formal Presidential policy statement on this subject was issued on 8 July 1981 by former President Ronald Reagan, as the "Conventional Arms Transfer Policy" of the United States.]

Congress of the United States House of Representatives Washington DC 20515

July 30, 1993

The Honorable William J. Clinton
The President
The White House
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to urge you as part of your review of foreign policy goals, to undertake a fundamental re-evaluation of U.S. arms transfer policy.

During the Cold War, the two superpowers transferred billions of dollars of weapons to the developing world every year as part of their strategic competition. With the dissolution of the U.S.S.R., and the attendant excess of conventional military equipment flooding global markets, we believe that it is urgently in the national interest to find a way to stop this spiral of militarization.

An overarmed developing world not only has a terrible human cost, it is also contrary to American interest in democracy, political stability, and a growing global economy. It is essential that we act now: our arms agreements with developing countries have more than doubled to an average of nearly \$17 billion per year since the end of the Cold War, and this trend could worsen.

Obviously, the solution to the problem of militarization and arms transfers must be a multilateral one. It will do neither us nor the developing world any good if we reduce exports only to find the gap filled by other suppliers. However, as the recent strengthening of the Nuclear Suppliers Group guidelines shows, multilateral solutions often require U.S. leadership.

Congress has already begun to address the need for arms restraint, enacting several initiatives:

- encouraging establishment of a multilateral arms restraint regime;

- imposing a one-year moratorium on the export of anti-personnel land mines and a call on the administration to negotiate a world-wide ban on their deployment; and
- calling on the administration to oppose multilateral lending to countries who refuse to reduce military spending in concert with their neighbors.

As you formulate your policy to tackle the crisis in arms transfers, we urge you to consider other concrete steps with which the United States can challenge other suppliers to join in a process of restraint. Such steps might include a short-term moratorium on arms transfers to unelected or repressive governments, or a ban on arms transfers to governments not complying with the new U.N. arms trade registry.

Whatever strategy you finally adopt, however, we believe that it will be far more likely to succeed if you personally present a vision to the American people and the world community of the human and economic benefits of a real and effective system of arms transfer restraint that could lead to a dramatically demilitarized world.

The public, both here and in other supplier nations such as in Europe and the former Soviet states, must understand that arms sales to developing countries are not a cost-free way to extend military production lines. That understanding would be greatly enhanced, at least in this country, if you explained that the last three times U.S. forces went into action—Panama, Iraq, and Somalia—they faced weapons or weapons technology either exported or financed by our own government.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue, which has such deep implications for your policy goals of promoting democracy abroad and economic growth at home. We look forward to working with you to achieve a new, responsible multilateral arms transfer policy that will reduce the huge and unnecessary global spending on armaments.

Sincerely

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