

PARLIAMENTARY COMMENT

On 14 March 1991, NDP critic John Brewin questioned the Prime Minister on his exchange with President Bush, suggesting that Bush had thrown "cold water" on the idea of a global summit, and asking: "Is the global summit dead? Are there alternatives that the government would have in mind if in fact the idea is a goner?" In response, Mulroney rejected this interpretation of the President's attitude, and commented:

...we began the process of examining [the global summit] last night. The Secretary of State for External Affairs met with eight heads of government, I believe, throughout the region in the last number of days. All of them believe that it had some merit. The President is going to examine it today with President Mitterrand and over the weekend with Prime Minister Major, and slowly but surely, hopefully, the idea will advance.¹⁴

On 27 March 1991, the Standing Committee on National Defence tabled its report on "The World Summit on the Instruments of War and Weapons of Mass Destruction." Broadly supportive of the Government's initiative, the Report recommended, *inter alia*, that an international arms transfer register be established under United Nations auspices. It then commented:

While the focus of the summit is global, the Committee wishes to suggest that the pursuit of this overarching interest might well be served by an initial emphasis on regional agreements. It is here that Canada has comparative advantages that should be put to good use.... Canada is now a member of the Organization of American States and has participated in the peace process in Central America. It should also be possible for us to play a major role in sub-Saharan Africa, where we could put our links with the Commonwealth and the Francophonie to good use. We are also a Pacific nation and our interest in maintaining stability in the North Pacific should not be ignored. [The Committee recommended, therefore, that] Canada should concentrate its efforts on helping to establish regional systems of arms transfer transparency, and these efforts should be targeted toward areas of Canadian diplomatic advantage.¹⁵

The strong Parliamentary support for the Government's conventional arms initiative did not extend to the amendment to the EIPA, which was sharply criticized, in particular by the NDP. The Liberal Party did not outrightly oppose the prospective sales, but took the view that the proposed amendment was too permissive. Liberal MPs indicated that they would seek specific sub-amendments in Committee "to put limits on the list of countries that can buy weapons from Canada and to oblige that list and any addition to the list to be sent to a committee of this House for examination and approval."¹⁶

¹⁴Commons Debates. 14 March 1991: 18468.

¹⁵Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs. *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence*, no. 63, 25-26 March 1991: 3-6.

¹⁶Commons Debates. 30 May 1991: 837.