

I rise to join the debate on Bill C-6 with a particular purpose in mind, and that is to respond to the suggestions of those Honourable Members who suggest that the proposed amendments to the Export and Import Permits Act (EIPA) are inconsistent with the arms control proposals made in February by the Prime Minister and Mr. Clark. No such inconsistency exists.

Under the proposed amendments, exports of automatic weapons will be subject to the same stringent controls that have long been applied to the export of other military goods from Canada. These controls fully reflect Canada's arms control and disarmament policies.

They are, in fact, driven by Canada's security policy, of which arms control and disarmament are major components. They allow, and have always allowed, the export of particular types of military equipment to particular countries under particular circumstances.

At the same time, they ensure, and will continue to ensure, that Canada does not contribute to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or to excessive build-ups of conventional arms.

What Canada proposed in February was that countries learn from the Gulf War, namely, that proliferation and excessive arms build-ups are destabilizing and dangerous and must be stopped.

We put forward a range of proposals aimed at mobilizing the political will and the mechanisms necessary to minimize these dangers in the future in the Middle East and elsewhere.

We proposed expanding and strengthening existing regimes to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

We also proposed measures to promote international transparency, consultations and restraint with a view to preventing excessive build-ups of conventional arms. By excessive build-ups of conventional arms, we mean the acquisition of quantities of conventional arms that go beyond legitimate defence requirements.

As my predecessor made very clear before a committee of this House in March, we are not proposing to put an end to the arms trade per se. Nor are we proposing to constrain any country's ability to acquire arms for legitimate defence purposes. We have never suggested that defence needs should be left unmet.

What we are proposing is that the international community should take appropriate measures to ensure that states will not in future be allowed to overarm themselves as Iraq did.

Since the question of arms control is fundamental to this debate, I believe it would be instructive to review the actions Canada has taken to date to follow up on our initiative.