

Last Thursday, after much reflection and very careful examination, I introduced Bill C-6 in this House. The amendments proposed in that Bill provide for the selective and severely restricted import, possession and export of automatic weapons for certain narrowly defined military and related industrial purposes.

Under present law, alone among Canada's few manufacturers of military materiel, our producers of automatic firearms and related equipment are effectively prevented from competing on a level playing field, even in that small part of the international market to which Canadian foreign policy would quite properly limit their access.

As things stand now, these firms can only manufacture such equipment for the Canadian military or police. They may not even produce for Canada's allies and closest defence partners, while foreign firms are at liberty to sell to Canada's Armed Forces. The restrictions put Canadian companies at an unnecessary disadvantage and threaten the viability of some. They could eventually preclude Canada from meeting its own future requirements for weapons.

Introducing carefully defined new flexibility to permit exports of automatic firearms to our NATO allies and close defence partners will demonstrate Canada's commitment to meeting its own requirements for basic defence products from Canadian sources. It will also enhance Canada's contribution to joint allied preparedness, most notably its role in the North American Defence Industrial Base.

As everyone in this House knows, Canada's role in UN peacekeeping is long-standing and widely respected. Imagine Canada's peacekeeping forces in country "x." Could they do their job without the appropriate weapons? And if our troops were there side-by-side with other UN peacekeeping forces, be they Swedish, Australian or whatever, would it be wrong for those Swedes or Australians to be armed with Canadian firearms? I think not.

Bill C-6 will place very tight controls on exports of automatic firearms from Canada by establishing a new Automatic Firearms Country Control List under the Export and Import Permits Act. Such controls are in keeping with Canada's traditional strict policy on exports of military weapons. They are also fully consistent with Canada's program of action to bring greater transparency and consultation to the international trade in conventional weapons. Our objective is to encourage restraint when excessive build-ups of conventional weapons begin to develop, particularly in regions of instability and potential conflict.

This in a nutshell is what Bill C-6 is all about.