

# PUTTING AN END TO BUSINESS AS USUAL

*A former US Assistant Secretary of Defense says the best way to prevent countries from getting their hands on large arsenals is for the leading arms merchants to stop selling them.*

BY PAUL C. WARNKE

**T**HE OVERWHELMING MILITARY VICTORY OF the allied forces in Desert Storm must not be allowed to obscure the policy failure that largely contributed to the creation of the Persian Gulf crisis. Between 1981 and 1988, Iraq acquired some \$48 billion worth of military hardware. "The largest accumulation ever of modern weapons by a Third World country," in the estimation of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*.

Most of these weapons were sold by the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and China, who are also the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. This is the same group that thereafter authorized the use of force to expel one of their major customers from Kuwait.

In recent decades, the United States has sought to contain the bitter antagonisms in the Middle East by fostering a delicate balance of power, principally by supplying arms to Israel, Iran and several Arab states. The policy has failed. In 1973, Egypt, Syria and Israel engaged in a brief but bloody conflict. In the 1980s, Iran and Iraq fought a war over disputed boundaries in which Iraq used poison gas and both countries saw the decimation of thousands of their young men.

Also, for many years, the US placed its faith in the Shah of Iran to maintain peace and stability in the Persian Gulf area. I must admit to a degree of complicity in this flawed policy concept because I served in the late 1960s in the administration of President Lyndon Johnson as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs, which office had major responsibility for weapons transfers.

THE SHAH OF IRAN WAS ONE OF OUR PRINCIPAL customers. American policy-makers saw him as a durable proconsul who would protect Western interests in the Middle East. Every spring, his generals would show up in Washington with their wish-list of military hardware. Working with our counterparts in the Department of State, we would cut back on the list but on the Shah's next visit to Washington he would have dinner with President Johnson and most of the deleted items would be restored.

In the administration of President Richard Nixon, virtually all limits were taken off and the Shah was allowed to buy just about everything he wanted. But his powerful foreign friends couldn't save him from his domestic enemies and his exit from Teheran was followed by the entrance of Ayatollah Khomeini and his virulently anti-Western regime. Together with our allies, we then built up Iraq as a counterpoise to Iran.

Subsequent events have dramatically illustrated that in arming the enemy of your enemy you are not necessarily making a new friend. Instead, the result may be only that subsequent conflicts in an area of heavy arms sales will result in death and devastation exponentially greater than if restraint had been exercised.

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE GULF WAR, THE BUSH administration has given mixed signals about its plans for conventional arms sales in the Middle East. Secretary of State James Baker has said that the United States should seek international cooperation "to reduce arms flow into an area that is already overmilitarized." But shortly thereafter the administration told Congress that it was considering selling over \$23 billion of arms in the next year to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt and Turkey. Moreover, Secretary Baker's deputy, Lawrence Eagleburger, declared during the Gulf crisis: "It is a policy of the United States that our diplomatic posts abroad should support the marketing efforts of US companies in the defense trade arena as in all other spheres of commercial activity." The sad history of overmilitarizing the Middle East apparently will not be allowed to interfere with business as usual.

Accordingly, it seems clear that the proliferation of modern weaponry throughout the Third World is basically a supply-side problem. What is needed is a fundamental reassessment of the policy of seeking stability by heavily arming the potential combatants. It is the responsibility of the major suppliers – Germany and Brazil, for example, along with the five permanent members of the UN Security

Council – to live up to their responsibility to achieve a more secure world by developing strict constraints on arms sales.

THE MIDDLE EAST IS THE LOGICAL TEST CASE, but not the only problem area. Some useful initiatives have been presented. President Bush has called for steps to prevent the development of weapons of mass destruction. Among other proposals, he has called for a cut-off of the production and importation of weapons-grade fissionable materials in the Middle East. The proposal should be broadened to make it a global policy. An international treaty commitment should be achieved to end further production of plutonium and highly-enriched uranium. President Bush has the germ of a good idea. But it is not a new idea, having been put forward by President Eisenhower almost forty years ago.

Some other useful arms control ideas have been advanced. US Senators John Kerry and Hank Brown proposed earlier this year that the President be required to report to the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Speaker of the House at least sixty days before announcement of an arms sale to the Middle East. A Canadian initiative last February has major merit. The proposal is that the five permanent members of the Security Council agree that weapons sold to the Middle East will never again include those weapons that are limited by the treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE). That would mean no sales of battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, artillery, combat aircraft and attack helicopters. As with a nuclear weapons material cut-off, this inhibition should be given global application.

SUPPLY-SIDE RESTRAINT BASED ON THE DEFINITIONS already worked out by the twenty-two countries that are parties to the CFE Treaty would cover the most destabilizing weapons and would save a lot of negotiating time. It would also prevent a potential unplanned and unfortunate consequence of the Treaty. Since equipment of the types covered by the Treaty can no longer be sent to Europe, much of it might be made available for sale into other