

LESSONS OF THE GULF WAR: ARMS

The Gulf War had lessons we ignore at our peril and that of future generations who will some day sit where we are today.

We must never again allow a state to become an over-armed menace to peace and security.

Many states represented here today contributed to the arming of Iraq. That war was devastating within its region.

Our publics had a good look at just what the implications are for uncontrolled arms sales. In ancient times this would have been seen as a sign from God -- and perhaps it was. In any case, it is a sign that we, as democratically elected leaders, cannot ignore. We have a responsibility to our publics to ensure that such a menace does not arise again.

Our publics see the end of the Cold War. They welcome the progress made in the conventional armed forces in Europe (CFE) negotiations. They see the reductions in our arsenals.

However, they emphatically do not want these weapons simply transferred to an up-and-coming version of Saddam Hussein somewhere.

I am not suggesting we negotiate at this meeting an arms control resolution.

What I am suggesting is that we send a message telling our publics -- as well as aspiring adventurers -- that the massive accumulation of arms is no longer on.

Let me emphasize here, I am not being naive.

Of course, countries have the right to arm themselves adequately and to manufacture and sell military equipment.

That is not what we are talking about. We are talking about preventing the creation of hugely disproportionate military imbalances, imbalances that threaten peace, imperil lives and divert enormous sums of money from other pressing problems -- economic assistance, for example.

CONVENTIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS

The negotiations on conventional armed forces in Europe, carried out within the framework of the objectives and purposes of the CSCE, have enabled countries to begin reducing their conventional arms inventories in meaningful ways.

However, the problem of arms transfers, excess production capacity and absence of transparency in the arms trade remain.