

goods licensed was US \$1.5 billion, of which US \$500 million were delivered. Despite this comparatively small amount, in the aftermath of the war, the militarily high-tech character of many of these transactions has led Congressional critics to charge that the Bush Administration adopted a permissive weapons export policy towards Iraq until just before Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990.

Together, the five permanent members of the Security Council supply approximately 90 percent of the arms trade. With the partial exception of China, since the Gulf War, all have made or supported proposals for curbs on arms transfers. Several weeks after the Canadian Government proposed a summit meeting on weapons of mass destruction and the arms trade, at a news conference in Ottawa, President Bush gave only faint support to this proposal and emphasized that the United States did not intend to cease weapons sales to Middle East countries. Four days later, on 19 March 1991, in prepared testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, US Defense Secretary Dick Cheney spoke of the need, in the aftermath of the Gulf War, "for tighter arms transfer and proliferation controls. Those responsible for violations of such control should be held strictly accountable."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, he and other Administration spokesmen made clear that controls on transfers would not preclude arms sales to US allies in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Shortly after these somewhat ambivalent statements from the Bush Administration, on 8 April 1991, British Prime Minister John Major called for the establishment of a universal register of arms sales to be supervised by the United Nations. Major received the support of the European Community for this proposal, and promised to pursue the initiative with other members of the Security Council. The British Government also indicated that it would seek to place the initiative on the agenda of the G-7 London meeting of the leading industrialized countries.

On 29 May 1991, in a noticeable change of emphasis, President Bush made a series of proposals for halting the proliferation of conventional and unconventional weapons in the Middle East which included a request to the major weapons suppliers to exercise "collective self restraint." Bush called for "a general code of responsible arms transfers" to include avoiding the transfer of "destabilizing" weapons and "effective domestic export controls on the end-use of arms or other items to be transferred." The suppliers would establish a mechanism for consultation to notify one another in advance of "certain arms sales," provide one another with annual reports on transfers, and meet regularly for consultative purposes.<sup>2</sup> He then proposed that the Permanent Members of the Security Council, Britain, China, France the Soviet Union and the United States, meet in Paris to discuss the

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<sup>1</sup>US Embassy. "Tighter Arms Transfer, Proliferation Controls Needed," *Text*, 91-20, 21 March 1991: 5.

<sup>2</sup>US Embassy. "Middle East Arms Control Initiative," *Backgrounder*, 91-39, 30 May 1991.