
Fact Sheet: Middle East Arms Control Initiative

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Fulfilling the pledge he made in his March 6 address to Congress, the President has announced proposals intended to curb the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons in the Middle East, and the missiles that can deliver them. The proposals also seek to restrain destabilizing conventional arms build-ups in the region.

The proposals would apply to the entire Middle East, including Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the other countries of the Maghreb and the Gulf Cooperation Council. They reflect US consultations with allies, governments in the region, and key suppliers of arms and technology.

The support of arms exporters and importers will be essential to the initiative's success. Since proliferation is a global problem, it requires a global solution. At the same time, the situation in the Middle East poses unique dangers and opportunities. Thus, the President's proposal will concentrate on the Middle East as its starting point, and complement other initiatives such as those taken by Prime Ministers John Major (of the United Kingdom) and Brian Mulroney (of Canada).

Supplier Restraint

The initiative calls on the five major suppliers of conventional arms to meet at senior levels in the near future to discuss the establishment of guidelines for restraints on destabilizing transfers of conventional arms, as well as weapons of mass destruction and associated technology. France has agreed to host the initial meeting. (The United Kingdom, France, the Soviet Union, China, and the United States have supplied the vast majority of the conventional arms exported to the Middle East in the last decade.) At the same time, these guidelines will permit countries in the region to acquire the conventional capabilities they legitimately need to deter and defend against military aggression.

These discussions will be expanded to include other suppliers in order to obtain the broadest possible cooperation. The London summit of the G-7, to be hosted by the British in July, will provide an early opportunity to begin to engage other governments.

To implement this regime, the suppliers would commit:

- To observe a general code of responsible arms transfers;
- To avoid destabilizing transfers; and
- To establish effective domestic export controls on the end-use of arms or other items to be transferred.

The guidelines will include a mechanism for consultations among suppliers, who would:

- Notify one another in advance of certain arms sales;
 - Meet regularly to consult on arms transfers;
 - Consult on an ad hoc basis if a supplier believed guidelines were not being observed,
- and
- Provide one another with an annual report on transfers.

Missiles

The initiative proposes a freeze on the acquisition, production, and testing of surface-to-surface missiles by states in the region with a view to the ultimate elimination of such missiles from their arsenals.

Suppliers would also step up efforts to coordinate export licensing for equipment, technology, and services that could be used to manufacture surface-to-surface missiles. Export licenses would be provided only for peaceful uses.

Nuclear Weapons

The initiative builds on existing institutions and focuses on activities directly related to nuclear weapons capability. The initiative would:

- Call on countries in the region to implement a verifiable ban on the production and acquisition of weapons usable nuclear material (enriched uranium or separated plutonium);
- Reiterate the US call on all countries in the region that have not already done so to accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty;
- Reiterate the US call to place all nuclear facilities in the region under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards; and
- Continue to support the eventual creation of a regional nuclear weapon free zone.

Chemical Weapons

The proposal will build on the President's recent initiative to achieve early completion of the global chemical weapons convention.

Proposed Middle East Arms Control Initiative

[Excerpts from remarks by President Bush at the U.S. Air Force Academy, May 29, 1991.]

... Nowhere are the dangers of weapons proliferation more urgent than in the Middle East. After consulting with governments in the region and elsewhere about how to slow and then reverse the build-up of unnecessary and destabilizing weapons, I am today proposing a Middle East Arms control initiative.

It features supplier guidelines on conventional arms exports; barriers to exports that contribute to weapons of mass destruction; a freeze now, and later a ban on surface-to-surface missiles in the region; and a ban on production of nuclear weapons material. Halting the proliferation of conventional and unconventional weapons in the Middle East, while supporting the legitimate needs of every state to defend itself, will require the cooperation of many states, in the region and around the world. It won't be easy—but the path to peace never is

- The initiative calls for all states in the region to commit to becoming original parties to the convention; and

- Given the history of possession and use of chemical weapons in the region, the initiative also calls for regional states to institute confidence building measures by engaging in pre-signature implementation of appropriate chemical weapons convention provisions.

Biological Weapons

As with the approach to chemical weapon controls, the proposals build on an existing global approach. The initiative would:

- Call for strengthening the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) through full implementation of existing BWC provisions and an improved mechanism for information exchange. These measures will be pursued at the 5-year review conference of the BWC this September.

- Urge countries to adopt biological weapons confidence-building measures.

This initiative complements continuing US support for the continuation of the UN Security Council embargo against arms transfers to Iraq, as well as the efforts of the UN Special Commission to eliminate Iraq's remaining capabilities to use or produce nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and the missiles to deliver them.