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Section: THE NATIONAL INTEREST

CONTAINING WEAPONS PROLIFERATION

THE Gulf War reminded the world of the perils of weapons proliferation. As Iraq's actions showed, nations that have territorial ambitions or perceive insecurity in their region will aggressively seek to buy more and better arms. The war also demonstrated to every ministry of defense both the political and military value of modern weapons technology.

More than a dozen nations are developing or producing ballistic or cruise missiles of significant payload and range, either for their own use or for export. The United States and many other countries sell advanced conventional military systems, such as precision-guided munitions and electronic warfare equipment.

It is now widely believed that three nations beyond the six declared nuclear weapons states, have a nuclear capability, and the number is growing. Concern is also growing over the spread of chemical and biological weapons, especially in the Middle East; that Iraq refrained from using chemicals should not lull us into complacency.

Disturbingly, the pace of military technology transfer and arms sales appears to be increasing. U.S. and Western European industries face declining defense budgets and are vigorously pursuing international markets. The Soviet Union, Eastern European countries, and China see arms sales as an important source of hard currency. Indeed, the very existence of excess capacity for weapons production encourages proliferation.

This combination of demand and supply for military technology weighs against the prospects for controlling proliferation. But the United States can combine several instruments of foreign policy--arms limitation agreements, export controls, diplomacy, and military and economic aid--to slow the process and perhaps avoid more destructive conflicts in the future.

Of the various types of arms, the United States has accumulated the most anti-proliferation experience with nuclear weapons, where a small group of supplier nations has reached a political consensus that enables them to control the export of such technology. These controls, while not perfect, have been more successful than had been anticipated.

The pattern of cooperation in the nuclear arena should prove helpful for controlling other technologies--missiles, for example--that have few suppliers and well-defined military uses. Export controls will prove more difficult to employ for technologies that have many suppliers and both commercial and military

uses. This category includes chemical and biological agents, as well as radar and communications technologies.

A major difficulty is that exporting countries will, quite properly, try to help their friends. The United States, for instance, will continue to provide arms to Israel. Supplier nations will argue, with considerable justification, that conventional military aid eases the security concerns of countries that receive it and hence dampens their interest in acquiring nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. And anti-proliferation efforts will sometimes be pushed aside by other strategic goals. In a particularly frustrating case, U.S. efforts to gain Pakistan's cooperation during the Afghan war overrode earlier attempts to slow Pakistan's entry into the nuclear club.

The United States should take a leadership role among supplier nations in slowing the spread of new military technology. First, policymaking needs to occur higher up the governmental ladder. At present, the responsibility for export controls is split among three departments--State, Commerce, and Defense. These agencies have different priorities--good relations, good business, and military advantage, respectively--that sometimes conflict. To balance competing interests and stifle bureaucratic differences, the president should delegate authority over export control policy to the national security adviser.

Second, proliferation controls should be focused as narrowly as possible on technology that relates to important military capabilities. As we learned in the efforts to control exports to the Soviet Bloc, restrictions on dual-use technology are ineffective and incur political costs disproportionate to their benefit.

Third, the United States should pursue nonproliferation as a multilateral endeavor. Unilateral moves are likely only to disadvantage domestic industry.

There will be occasions, however, when a leadership role will require the United States to stand alone against a particularly egregious and dangerous act of proliferation. An example of the effectiveness of such leadership occurred in the early months of the Carter Administration, when I saw a few talented officials focus world attention on the problems that could arise from uncontrolled commerce in nuclear technology. The ultimate result was the formation of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which has successfully controlled the export of sensitive nuclear technology. In critical cases, the United States should not underestimate its ability to take effective worldwide action.

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