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# ***LEGISLATION AND POLICY***

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## **U.S. Policy on Arms Transfers to Latin America**

**A Policy Statement Issued by**

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[The following is a reprint of a 1 August 1997 public release by the White House.]

Following a review of Administration security policy in Latin America, the President has decided to establish a process for case-by-case consideration of requests for advanced arms transfers to countries of that region. This decision puts U.S. arms transfer policy toward Latin America on a par with our policy toward other regions of the world and will be implemented in a way that serves our objective of promoting stability, restraint, and cooperation in the region.

In the last decade, Latin America has changed dramatically from a region dominated by coups and military governments to one of democracy and civilian control. Our partnership with countries in the region has reached a new level of maturity, cooperation, and dialogue. As their democracies strengthen and their economies grow, the governments of some Latin American countries are now addressing the need to modernize their militaries. They are doing so in the context of greatly improved regional political cooperation and economic integration, and of increased defense cooperation, transparency, and confidence-building.

It is in America's national security interest to promote stability and security among our neighbors in the hemisphere by engaging with them as equal partners as they modernize and restructure their defense establishments. In considering requests from appropriate civilian authorities for advanced conventional arms, we will take into account our guiding goals of strengthening democracy, including civilian control of the military; focusing resources on needed social and economic development; preventing an arms race; supporting transparency and confidence-building; and ensuring that defense modernization occurs responsibly and with restraint.

An interagency group has been formed under the Chairmanship of the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs [Dr. Lynn E. Davis] to address and coordinate our efforts to achieve our security goals for the region, including enhancing regional cooperation and stability, and considering requests for advanced conventional arms transfers.

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[The following policy-related questions and answers are extracted from a jointly prepared DoD-Department of State paper, "LATAM Conventional Arms Transfer (CAT) Policy, dated 5 August 1997.]

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***Q. [Does this new policy mean that the Administration has] decided to sell U.S. advanced fighter aircraft to Chile?***

A. In principle, yes.

- As you know, the Chilean government is engaged in a process of soliciting international bids for advanced fighter aircraft. While the policy review was ongoing, we informed Chile that we could provide technical data but that we had not made a decision whether we were prepared to approve the transfer of U.S. origin advanced fighters to Chile.
- We have now decided that, in principle, yes we would approve such a transfer, although the exact nature of what we will be prepared to offer Chile will need to be worked out by the State-chaired interagency committee as the consideration of this case goes forward.

***Q. Some believe the sale of high-tech arms to Latin America will start an unwanted arms race. What specific steps is the United States taking to prevent an arms race?***

A. The United States has taken a leading role in the hemisphere in encouraging the adoption of transparency and confidence-building measures that would help avoid an arms race.

For example:

- This June, at our urging, the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted a resolution in support of negotiating a legal framework on advance notification of major arms acquisitions by governments in the region. We hope such a legal framework will be ready for adoption at the Summit of the Americas in *Santiago* next April.
- In support of the OAS Declaration of *Santiago on Confidence and Security Building Measures*, the United States has taken the initiative to provide advance notification to all the democracies of the region of major arms acquisitions covered by the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.
- It also provides governments in the hemisphere advance notice of joint military exercises planned in the region and annually presents its defense policy and budget as a confidence-building measure.
- Many governments in the region, including Chile, Argentina, and Brazil, have also adopted confidence-building measures that are helping to create a climate of trust among once-hostile neighbors.

***Q. Former President Jimmy Carter, Nobel Peace Prize Winner Oscar Arias, and other hemispheric leaders have proposed the adoption of a two-year moratorium on the purchase of advanced fighter aircraft. What is the USG position on this proposal?***

A. The United States would certainly respect such a moratorium, and would seek to persuade other suppliers to do likewise, if it arose from the leaders of the region itself.

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***Q. Does this decision mean the U.S. is no longer imposing a ban on high-tech arms transfers to Latin America?***

A. A ban is 'no' under any circumstances, which was never the case in our policy toward Latin America. Rather, there was a presumption against such transfers, given circumstances in the region.

- In the case of advanced fighter aircraft, the United States did approve the sale of a squadron of F-16s to Venezuela in 1982. We have now decided to move to case-by-case consideration of requests for advanced arms subject to a policy of restraint, meaning we will be very careful and cautious, so as to ensure that a sale will serve our overall goals for individual countries and the region as a whole.

***Q. Does this new policy mean you will sell U.S. advanced arms to Peru or Ecuador?***

A. Case-by-case-means just that, that each case must be reviewed on its merits and in light of its own special circumstances. In this case, those circumstances include the 1995 border conflict between Peru and Ecuador, and our role as guarantor of the Rio protocol and as an active participant in the peacekeeping force along the disputed border. In this capacity, we have urged both Peru and Ecuador to restrain their purchases of weapons that could destabilize the talks currently underway and continue to encourage them to reach a definitive solution to the problem.

- We have advised both governments against the acquisition of advanced arms, and have no plans to sell such equipment either. We have made the same points to potential suppliers.

***Q. Given the absence of any serious security threats that would require advanced fighters in the region, isn't this decision really all about keeping U.S. defense contractors in business?"***

A. We recognize that some governments in the region wish to modernize their force structure and equipment, which in many cases is reaching the end of their useful lives. This decision was driven by our national security interests in working with those governments as they modernize their forces. The scope of their requirements, however, is unlikely to have a significant impact on U.S. defense contractors.