
U.S. Announces Major Reform of Computer Export Controls

Statement by

President William J. Clinton

[The following is a Presidential statement which was released by the White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Washington DC, on October 6, 1995.]

Today, I am pleased to announce a major reform of our computer export controls that will adjust to the global spread of technology while preserving our vital national security interests.

Effective export controls are a critical part of national security, especially a strong non-proliferation policy. Our control regulations must focus principally on exports that have significant national security applications and which are not so widely available in open commerce that controls are ineffective.

When I came into office, virtually all computers more powerful than a basic desktop required an export license from the government—even though many of these machines could be purchased in electronics stores from Hong Kong to Frankfurt, as well as in cities across America. Both the U.S. Government and American exporters spent millions of dollars and thousands of hours implementing and complying with a tangled web of export control regulations.

Two years ago, to bring our export control system into line with new developments in computer technology and the changing nature of the threats to our national security, I relieved billions of dollars worth of exports from outdated and unnecessary controls and instructed my Administration to thoroughly and periodically review the controls on computer exports. The purpose of this review was to determine how changes in computer technology and its military applications should affect our export control regulations.

Now, in the wake of a careful reevaluation by the Department of Defense, I have instructed my Administration to update our controls to ensure that computers that could have a significant military impact on U.S. and allied security interests remain carefully controlled, while controls that are unnecessary or ineffective are eliminated.

Specifically, I have decided to eliminate controls on the export of all computers to countries in North America, most of Europe, and parts of Asia. For a number of other countries, including many in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe, we will ease but not eliminate computer export controls. For the former Soviet Union, China, and a number of other countries, we will focus our controls on computers intended for military end uses or users, while easing them on the export of computers to civilian customers. Finally, we will continue to deny computer technology to terrorist countries around the world.

This decision will relieve U.S. computer manufacturers of unnecessary and ineffective regulations which often have tied their hands while foreign competitors won major contracts or built their own systems. It will help preserve the strength of the U.S. computer industry, which also is key to our national security. It is good for U.S. workers and U.S. business.

This decision will benefit our national security in a number of other ways. Trying to regulate the export of computers that are increasingly available in markets abroad is a recipe

for an ineffective non-proliferation policy. It imposes serious regulatory burdens without improving our national security, and diverts resources from the pursuit of other important non-proliferation objectives.

Today's action will strengthen our non-proliferation policy by targeting our export control resources on those areas where they can make a difference. It will complement our work in the New Forum—the multilateral regime we are forming to control arms and sensitive dual-use technologies—where we will work with our partners to encourage development of multilateral transparency and controls on computers consistent with our national controls. It will reinforce other steps we have taken in this Administration to achieve concrete goals—such as the indefinite extension of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, denuclearization of Ukraine, stopping the North Korean nuclear weapons program, and a negotiation of a comprehensive test ban—in our efforts to combat proliferation.