
Defense Report

AUSA



Foreign Military Sales; Good or Bad?

The United States is currently selling billions of dollars of arms to various foreign nations under what is called the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Program. Although these arms are being sold rather than given away as in the past, and therefore have a significant beneficial impact on U.S. foreign trade balances, there are many critics who say the program is too big, is immoral, and should be cut back.

Nations are usually interested in buying arms for one or more of four reasons: (1) maintaining internal order, (2) self-defense or deterrence from external attack, (3) preparation for offensive action, and (4) pride, or "Keeping up with the Jones."

Critics of U.S. arms sales tend to consider all such sales as being intended for offensive purposes which is often not correct. Even when offensive use is a possibility, defenders of U.S. foreign military sales point out that with the arms must go U.S. advisors and technicians and with them a golden opportunity to serve as a moderating influence in the event offensive use is being considered, as well as an opportunity to create or improve U.S. friendship with the country concerned.

As one of the top U.S. Army strategic planners put it, "We are being inexcusably arrogant to refuse to sell arms because we believe that a nation does not need them, or should spend the money instead to help solve domestic problems. Once a nation decides it needs arms, it is going to buy them from someone. By not selling them ourselves, we deprive U.S. manufacturers and workers of an opportunity for profit, more important, our nation loses a chance to influence the affairs of the country concerned and thereby assist in maintaining world peace and stability."

The Soviets fully understand what the Army planner was talking about. About 20 years ago, the U.S.S.R. began to export arms to the Middle East. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, an independent organization which takes pleasure in criticizing both the East and the West and therefore has considerable credibility, today the Soviets rank number two among the world's exporters of military arms and equipment.

However, keeping up with the Soviets is not the name of the game when foreign military sales are concerned. But U.S. policy-makers would do well to think "Buy American" when dealing with the subject.