



COMMENTARY

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Proposed UN Resolution Could Hurt Iran

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On March 14, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council together with Germany submitted a draft resolution that would broaden the embargo against Iran. As part of the international effort to derail Tehran's nuclear program, the proposed resolution seeks, amongst other things, to ban all procurement of Iranian "arms or related material." Though harsher sanctions will be required before Iran thinks again about suspending its nuclear program, a global embargo on its defense exports could nevertheless be a painful blow.

In 2005, Iran exported around \$100 million worth of military hardware. Its defense industrial base has grown significantly and today manufactures a range of systems and platforms, from small arms through shaped explosive charges and rockets to helicopters and aircraft. However, it is not the loss of this rather insignificant source of foreign currency—Iran exported an estimated \$63 billion worth of commodities in 2006—that will cause Tehran to wince if the sanctions are approved by the UN Security Council next week. Rather, it is the loss of a key foreign and national security policy tool.

In recent years, some 40 countries across the globe have imported Iranian military goods and services. As acknowledged by former Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani, defense exports have ranged "from technical know-how and the construction of factories to raw material and different heavy weaponry." In the past two years alone, several major arms export efforts have borne fruit. Sri Lanka signed an order to procure \$150 million worth of military equipment. Senegal expressed an interest in acquiring armored vehicles, munitions, and air defense systems and signed a memorandum of understanding to increase cooperation in technical and military areas; Iran hopes that this deal will set the stage for cooperation with other African countries. Also in 2005, defense cooperation agreements, which included sales of defense equipment, construction of manufacturing or repair facilities, and training of military units, were signed with Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and Algeria.

Iran, of course, is not the first country to include arms exports as part of its national security strategy. Throughout history, governments have used the outputs of their defense industries to facilitate their dealings with other governments. Yet for Iran, as for other pariah states in the past, defense exports are a particularly important way of creating, maintaining, and expanding diplomatic relations. South Africa during the apartheid period, for example, used arms deals to enhance diplomatic contacts with countries such as Chile, Mozambique, and Cambodia. In addition, the interest that foreign governments express in its military capabilities is a great public relations tool for Tehran, enabling it to flaunt its defense industrial base and claim that attempts to disrupt advances in its military capability have backfired.

It is therefore very much in Iran's national interest to continue its defense trade efforts even if the UN decides to approve the new round of sanctions. The key challenge facing the international community will be to ensure that the arms export ban is strictly enforced. Iran already has an extensive clandestine network in place to distribute arms across the globe, which it uses primarily to provide weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon and to Shiite militia groups in Iraq. A multiagency,

multinational effort will be required to uncover Iranian defense exports and collaboratively foil them. Yet such an effort will be worth the investment if it succeeds in denying Iran a critical element of its foreign and national security policy and in pressuring it to reconsider its nuclear ambitions.

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