



Europe must press its case on China arms ban to US Congress

FPC report: EU-US row over lifting of arms embargo due to European public diplomacy failure, not policy disagreement

Attention: foreign newsdesks, diplomatic editors, defence and EU correspondents
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European leaders must mount a forceful public diplomacy campaign to convince the US Congress that they will continue to restrict the export of arms to China effectively after lifting the 1989 embargo, according to a new Foreign Policy Centre report.

The 1989 China Arms Ban: Putting Europe's Position to Congress, by FPC Research Director Dr Greg Austin, argues that the transatlantic dispute over the EU decision to lift the embargo targeted at China is damaging and unnecessary. While the US administration has tacitly accepted the lifting of the EU ban, the US Congress has wrongly portrayed the European move as deliberately undermining of US policy towards China – and European leaders have failed to react.

The lifting of the embargo will not change the military balance in East Asia nor affect the Chinese calculus of risk over the use of force against Taiwan, Dr Austin argues. It is also ineffective as a mechanism to compel China's leadership to improve its domestic human rights policies.

As a result, the dispute has emerged as 'a powerful test of Europe's new security policy, and of its ability to communicate decisions to key allies and stakeholders'. European leaders must respond to the veiled threats from Congress leaders with a 'vigorous public diplomacy campaign' to explain their reasoning.

'The "strength of feeling" in the USA on the arms ban to China is actually built on domestic political considerations - as most embargo policies are - and not on any evaluation of the effectiveness of the embargo in changing the policy of the target state,' Dr Austin states.

'Leading EU members states such as Britain, France, Italy and Germany must deliver a common message to the US Congress that they will continue to restrict exports of European arms to China effectively – even if the 1989 ban is written off the books.'

KEY ANALYSIS:

1. If the 1989 ban is lifted, sales of European arms may double or even treble but will not significantly affect Chinese military capabilities in the next 10-20 years.

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2. The EU Code of Conduct on arms exports will continue to provide an effective framework for restricting sales of sensitive European technology and weapons to China, without the need for a China-specific ban.
3. Maintaining the EU's 1989 arms embargo is ineffective as a mechanism for encouraging the Chinese leadership to alter its human rights policies and is hampering a partnership between the US and China to address pressing issues of global governance.
4. Since the US administration has little interest in using its political capital with Congress on Europe's behalf, European politicians and specialists must take their case to Congress themselves through a forceful public diplomacy campaign, requiring a commitment of time and resources.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. *The 1989 China Arms Ban: Selling Europe's Position to Congress* by Dr Greg Austin is published today by the Foreign Policy Centre.
2. Dr Greg Austin is Director of Research at the Foreign Policy Centre and author or editor of several books and reports on China. Previously he held senior posts with the International Crisis Group (ICG) including as Director of Research and Director of the Asia Programme in the Brussels and Washington offices. He is a security expert and in 2003 led a team of specialists on a six-month project to review UK conflict prevention strategies. Previous publications include *Japan and Greater China: Political Economy and Military Power in the Asian Century* (Hurst & Co, 2001), *The Armed Forces of Russia* (I.B.Tauris, New York, 2000).
3. The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Foreign Policy Centre.

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