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Selling American Weapons Overseas Is Risky Business

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In “[America Needs to Sell More Weapons](#)” (op-ed, July 1), Alexander Benard extols the merits of increasing arms transfers, but his argument rests on several common misunderstandings about the arms trade.

The U.S. makes arms-sales decisions under legislative restrictions Mr. Benard doesn’t address. The 1976 Arms Export Control Act creates a directive to ensure that American-made weapons don’t spark arms races, support terrorism, or enable human-rights violations abroad. These aren’t “worries” or “aversions.” It’s the law.

Mr. Benard also completely ignores the possibility that arms transfers can create negative downstream consequences. Deteriorating governance in Turkey and human-rights violations in Vietnam are legitimate causes for concern. These factors could easily lead to American weapons being used for purposes counter to U.S. national strategic interests. U.S. troops have fought combatants armed with U.S. weapons at some point in each of the last three decades. Dispersion and black markets feed criminal activity and terrorism. Widespread violence and internal conflict destabilizes countries and regions.

The United States should instead move in the opposite direction—selectivity is an asset to leverage.

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