FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618) 462-5415

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PEARL HARBOR LESSON

After the Pearl Harbor attack of December 7, 1941, savage criticism was leveled at those who had supported or voted for scrap iron shipments to Japan, which allegedly had been turned into weapons of war. The Pearl anniversary is a good time to examine the technology shipments to the Soviet Union and to speculate about how the nation (and the voters) will view those who have allowed technology shipments to the Soviet bloc.

Soviet military capabilities have been significantly strengthened by shipments of Western technology. Since Russian spies stole the secrets of the atom bomb in the 1950s, the Soviet Union has consistently tried to obtain Western military technology by every means possible: theft, purchase, phony trade, gift, and transfers through European middlemen to conceal the ultimate destination.

Modern technology, especially computers, is absolutely essential to modern warfare. A recent report by the Heritage Foundation shows that "a virtual hemorrhage of technology in the past decade" is a major explanation for the massive shift in the military balance from the U.S. to the U.S.S.R. The Soviets have used Western technology to make progress they could not otherwise have made in signal processing, command and control systems, semi-conductor manufacturing, guidance, and weapons technology.

In the 1960s, the Soviet Union propaganda/disinformation apparatus launched an offensive called "East-West trade." The notion was spread in naive circles that trade and business interchanges could somehow induce nations to like each other and help prevent war. If the propagators of this notion had bothered to review history, they would have discovered that most wars are fought between nations that know each other very well and are solidly locked in economic relationships.

But the momentum for "East-West trade" persisted. Henry Kissinger coined a new word to justify it: "linkage." The notion was that, if we could be "linked" by trade with the Soviet Union, the two superpowers would diminish their enmity and share common goals.

Considering that the invasion of Afghanistan and the shooting down of Korean Air

Lines #007 came after all our trade overtures, it is difficult for anyone to buy that Kissinger argument any more.

The semi-conductor industry has moved so fast in improving its technology that the list of Militarily Critical Technologies is not up to date. How can we deal with the problem posed by the fact that Radio Shack offers computing systems with semi-conductor components that are more sophisticated than most of those used in U.S. defense systems?

A great deal of precious U.S. technology has been authorized for shipment under the jargon that it is justified by "foreign availability" (in other words, the Soviets can get it elsewhere, so why not from us?). It isn't that simple. "Availability" does not answer crucial questions of comparability, quantity, quality, price, and maintenance.

Current policy in this area is governed by the Export Administration Act ([redacted]) of 1979 which authorized the President to restrict the export of "dual-use" goods and technology (that is, non-military items which can also be used to contribute to the military potential of the Soviet bloc), and of other exports where necessary to further U.S. foreign policy objectives or obligations.

National security controls are managed by the Department of Commerce. One wonders if this conflict of interest is not the reason for its generally poor record on national security controls. The Commerce Department usually sees its function as one of promoting U.S. exports. So how can it be objective in its other role as licenser and enforcer of export restraints?

Many people believe that we need a new independent agency to deal with export control/national security issues, or at least a high-level advocate within the Executive Branch, to present a national security perspective on these issues.

The Heritage Foundation's recommendations for dealing with this problem are: (1) establishing an Office of Strategic Trade, (2) turning over enforcement of export control laws to the Customs Service, which has the needed expertise, (3) toughening licensing laws, (4) tighter oversight of shipments to Western nations in order to reduce diversion of our technology to the Soviet bloc, (5) U.S. action against companies that violate our export restrictions outside of the United States, and (6) increasing the President's ability to restrict imports in order to put more pressure on potential foreign violators.