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Yahoo! News Thu, Jan 28, 2004

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US rebuffs Chirac's call to end China arms embargo



Wed Jan 28, 9:30 PM ET

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WASHINGTON (AFP) - The United States took a dim view of French President Jacques Chirac's call for an end to a European Union ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) embargo on arms sales to Beijing, in the latest sign of frosty ties between Paris and Washington.

[AFP Photo](#)

Chirac gave the undertaking during talks with Chinese President Hu Jintao in Paris, saying the embargo, slapped on China after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre "makes no more sense today."

The State Department said it viewed bans on arms sales to China by the United States and EU as complimentary, and did not agree they should be lifted.

"For the United States, our statutes and regulations prohibit sales of defense items to China," said spokesman Richard Boucher

"We believe that others should maintain their current arms embargoes as well."

"We believe that the US and European prohibitions on arms sales are complementary, were imposed for the same reason, specifically serious human rights abuses, and that those reasons remain valid today."

Chirac said Tuesday French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin urged his EU counterparts in Brussels to lift the embargo, "which dates back more than 15 years and which no longer corresponds with the political reality of the contemporary world."

That meeting referred the issue to technical-level officials for review.

Chirac said he hoped the restriction would be scrapped "in the coming months".

The embargo was imposed after June 1989, when China sent tanks to crush weeks-long pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in central Beijing, killing hundreds.

Several EU countries, including the Netherlands and Sweden, are reluctant to lift the ban, citing notably China's controversial human rights record, according to diplomats.

The United States and China, at odds on a battery of international issues, seem to be on the same page at least on Beijing's relations with Taiwan.

Chirac used the Hu visit, to the dismay of Taipei, to forcibly oppose Taiwan's plans for a referendum in March on Beijing's military threat.

In a joint declaration with Hu, Chirac affirmed that the nationalist island was "a part of China" and said France "opposes any unilateral step, including a referendum aimed at changing the status quo, which would increase tensions in the Straits and lead to the independence of Taiwan."

That language mirrored almost exactly President George W. Bush ([news](#) - [web sites](#))'s warning to Taiwan, given in the Oval Office during a visit to Washington last month by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.

Relations between France and the United States plunged to a modern low last year as the two traditional allies clashed on US-led war over Iraq ([news](#) - [web sites](#))

Just last week, US Secretary of State Colin Powell ([news - web sites](#)) admitted he was sometimes annoyed by France's world view.

"The French are a proud people that have strong views about things, and from time to time, yes, they have annoyed me," Powell said. "And I'm sure from time to time I have annoyed them."

Nevertheless, he paid tribute to the French who he noted had been US allies since colonial America fought for and won independence from Britain in the late 1700s.

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