

No Big Arms Sales to China if Embargo Lifted-Chirac



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By Elaine Lies

TOKYO (Reuters) - French President Jacques Chirac sought to reassure Japan Sunday that lifting Europe's embargo on arms exports to China would not result in an increase in weapons sales, saying the move was aimed at normalizing ties.

France has led efforts to secure an early end to the European Union ([news - web sites](#)) embargo, imposed after China's bloody 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy protests, despite pressure from Washington to keep it in place out of fear China may get access to advanced weapons.

Japan has also expressed concern, saying that lifting the embargo could destabilize the Asian region.

Speaking after a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Chirac said: "I told him that arms exports to China won't take place; the same with sensitive technology."

Chirac said the reason for lifting the ban was political and that it was no longer appropriate.

"The conditions are not the same as when it was put in place," Chirac told a joint news conference with Koizumi.

"It is no longer valid."

Koizumi said Japan remained opposed to lifting the embargo.

"We expressed our concern and our opposition," Koizumi said, noting that China's military budget has been increasing by double digits in recent years.

The EU, eager to boost trade and diplomatic ties with China, agreed last year to aim to lift the embargo by the end of June.

It says arms exports would be more tightly regulated through a revised "code of conduct" to be agreed soon.

But Beijing's recent passage of a law sanctioning the use of force to curtail any moves toward independence by Taiwan has made some EU nations, including Britain, more wary.

In a joint statement issued after their meeting, the two leaders called for a quick re-start of six-way talks on North Korea ([news - web sites](#))'s nuclear weapons program.

The talks -- involving North Korea, the United States, China, Japan, Russia and South Korea ([news - web sites](#)) -- have been on hold since June.

Chirac also reiterated France's support for Japan's bid to secure a permanent seat on the United Nations ([news - web sites](#)) Security Council.

"We have long supported the candidacy of Japan," he said.

China, which was brutally occupied by Japan before and during World War II, opposes a permanent seat for Japan.

FUSION FRICTION

Koizumi said Japan would not withdraw its bid to build the world's first nuclear fusion reactor in favor of France.

"We don't have any intention of withdrawing," he said.

"It's best to find a solution agreeable to both sides and we will continue to discuss it," he said.

European Research Commissioner Janez Potocnik has said the EU wants to start building the reactor in Cadarache, France, and will do so without an international agreement if it has to.

Japan wants it built in Rokkasho, a fishing village in northern Japan. The United States, China, Russia and South Korea are also involved in the project.

The United States and South Korea back Japan's bid.

Construction of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) is forecast to cost some \$6 billion over 10 years.

Including a development phase, the ITER project is forecast to last 30 years at an overall cost of about \$13 billion.

Chirac, a devoted Japanophile and passionate sumo fan who has made as many as 50 private and public trips to Japan, arrived in the western city of Osaka Saturday.

After a morning meeting with local business leaders, he spent several hours watching sumo.

Greeted with a standing ovation and shouts of "Chirac" as he entered at the start of the match, the French president sat on the edge of his seat as the wrestlers grappled, eyes fixed on the action. Later he had dinner with the wrestlers.

Monday, Chirac was due to speak at a seminar and have lunch with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko prior to returning to France Tuesday.

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