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Letter, L. H. Evans Director General, to Mr. Tielman de Waal, Chief Executive of Armscor, Regarding Arms Sales

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Summary:

The Director General Evans writes to the Chief Executive of Armscor recommending South Africa be more discreet when selling arms to other states.

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27 July 1994

Mr Tielman de Waal
Chief Executive
Armscor
PRETORIA

Dear Mr de Waal

My Department has an appreciation for the important contribution which the export of South African military equipment, arms and military technology make to South Africa's balance of payments.

I am, however, becoming concerned about the effect that the publicity for South Africa's arms exports is having on public opinion and on South Africa's relations with a number of key countries.

While current opinion calls for transparency I believe that in matters as sensitive and potentially controversial as arms marketing and sales, a more discreet approach is in the national interest.

The factors influencing my opinion are the following:

1. The underlying pacifist attitude which in public opinion, in especially the First World, claims that arms sales are inherently immoral. It is common wisdom in this quarter that the expenditure on all forms of armament is unjustified and should be diverted to projects of a peaceful nature, especially in the developing world. The recent Rwanda experience is a graphic example of how a humanitarian disaster can unforeseen negative results in this area.

2. The concern in the industrialized countries about questions of proliferation, of both conventional weapons as well as weapons of mass destruction by South Africa. Despite the steps South Africa has taken to dismantle its nuclear deterent, to join dual-use technology suppliers groups and to be more transparent in its marketing and sales policies, anything which heightens the consciousness of decision-makers tends to revive suspicions about South Africa's motives and capabilities.

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3. In recent negotiations with Japan and the European Union it became apparent that the announcement on South Africa's intention to triple our arms exports could put the prospect of development assistance from these countries in jeopardy. In the case of Japan, one of the world's three major economies and major donors, a policy of linkage between the granting of development assistance to arms exports exists.

This Department was requested to supply Japanese officials with the criteria used to determine the classification of recipient countries to enable them to defend their decisions to given aid to South Africa, if confronted by the Japanese Parliament.

As you are aware, the US has raised concerned directly with Minister Modise

Because I believe that publicity aimed at the general public about arms sales is counterproductive, I would urge you to remain circumspect in this regard.

Yours sincerely

L.H. EVANS
DIRECTOR GENERAL