

## **E.U. Wavers On Allowing Arms Sales To Beijing; U.S. Pressure, China Law May Keep Embargo in Place**

The European Union's consensus to lift a 15-year embargo on arms sales to China has fallen apart under increasing pressure from the United States, a new Chinese threat to Taiwan and intensified criticism at home, officials and analysts said Tuesday.

While President Jacques Chirac of France remained committed to resuming weapons sales, officials said the leaders of Britain and several other European countries are backing away from making an immediate decision. The position of Germany, which had supported the lifting of the ban, was unclear Tuesday evening.

In explaining the shift, officials and analysts cited strong U.S. lobbying against lifting the ban, as well as the passage last week of a Chinese law authorizing the use of force against Taiwan if it seeks formal independence.

The embargo issue was not on the formal agenda for the two-day E.U. summit that began Tuesday night in Brussels, but officials said it was certain to be discussed in private sessions and would likely be raised by reporters at news conferences.

They stressed that no decision had been made to delay the lifting of the embargo, but that Javier Solana, the E.U.'s foreign policy chief, faced the difficult task of forging a new consensus. Under E.U. rules, any one of its 25 members could veto a lifting of the ban.

Last December, E.U. leaders committed themselves to work toward ending the ban. Although they did not set a firm timetable, several officials, including British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, predicted it would be scrapped before July. But on Sunday, Straw told Britain's ITV network that human rights problems and the Taiwan issue "have actually got more difficult rather than less difficult."

Solana's spokeswoman, Cristina Gallach, said the E.U.'s official position had not changed, but added, "We have to admit at least one issue has made the process of decision-making more complex, which is the anti-secession law."

The British government has said it continues to support in principle the idea of lifting the embargo but has insisted upon updating a code of conduct it says would help regulate the kinds of weapons and technology China would receive. "The bottom line is there are more people in the anti-lift brigade right now than backing the French position," a British official said on condition of anonymity.

France and Germany have long derided the ban as a Cold War relic that has hobbled the growth of trade between China and Europe. In October, Chirac reiterated his opposition to the ban during a state visit to China, where he announced \$5 billion in new contracts for French exports.

Human rights groups in Europe have said scrapping the embargo would send the wrong signal to the Chinese government. The European Parliament has passed four resolutions over the past year supporting the embargo, and leaders of the foreign affairs committee of Germany's parliament have also opposed lifting the ban.

**"The fact is, legislators on both sides of the Atlantic don't want to end the embargo," said John Wyles, an E.U. analyst in Brussels. "The argument's beginning to hit home that**

European soft power is all about democratic rule of law, human rights and so on, and here we are about to reward the Chinese for doing nothing."

"The French are hanging tough because they have a different vision: Lifting the embargo moves Europe a little further from the United States and closer to the Asian land mass," Wyles said. "But the Germans are pretty crucial."

After Iraq, he added, the German chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, "doesn't want to get into another argument with Bush or with the American Congress."

China signaled its anger over reports that the E.U. might delay lifting the ban. "The arms embargo against China is political discrimination, which is not in line with today's reality," said a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Liu Jianchao, according to the Associated Press.