

Waging peace

Were it not so serious, so ripe for tragedy, so rooted in pathos, we might laugh at ourselves, our allies, and most of those people we perceive to be our enemies. As it is, however, we cannot even manage a sardonic smile.

We refer to the recent request (April) made by Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy that our allies throughout the world halt shipments of arms to Iraq and Iran. Murphy, after a two-week tour of the Middle East, met with Egyptian President Mubarak in Cairo to discuss the Persian Gulf war. Still raging after nearly four years, that war now threatens oil supplies vital to western European nations and to Japan. Murphy is quoted as stating, "We would all like to see the Persian Gulf war brought to an end as quickly as possible."

Rationale for cutting off arms shipments, of course, is that when Iran and Iraq exhaust their ammunition, destroy their military equipment, shoot down the planes, knock out the guns and tanks, blow up the ships and supplies, the two nations will either stop fighting or will be reduced to fisticuffs.

The United States prudently suspended shipments of arms and military supplies to both belligerents when war broke out between them in 1980. What was not done then, however, was to make sure other nations (Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel) also ceased shipping arms and supplies to Iran and/or Iraq. The warring states have obviously been getting supplies from somebody.

While we assume a posture of peace-lovers and decline to provide weapons to either side, we go ahead without qualms and sell military supplies to other nations who, in turn, pass them along (at a price, of course) to those warring countries.

Our pretense of virtue because we have stopped direct shipments to Iran and Iraq smacks of gross hypocrisy for we have, in truth, contributed in large share to the misery inherent in that conflict. Iranians and Iraqis do battle against

one another using arms that originated in the United States whether or not they acquired them directly from us.

Were we sincere about making our goal peace on earth, we would produce no weapons except those needed for our own defense. And, when those weapons became obsolete, we would not dispense of them by selling them to some other country. Unless they could be converted to peaceful purposes, we would scrap them.

The most effective way to wage peace, at home or abroad, is by reducing the world's store of weaponry, not by increasing it, and not by participating in any way in the proliferation of weapons of any kind.

There's always the argument that if we don't supply arms to other nations, someone else will. Let them. Would you willingly allow a gun to fall into the hands of a person who might hold you up or shoot you? Why, then, sell weapons at all? Consider how quickly and easily nations switch their allegiance, depending entirely upon expediency!

And there's always the argument that we must export weapons to maintain balance in foreign trade. The best way to achieve balance in foreign trade is to market production of goods and services to thriving populations enjoying peace and plenty and rising standards of living. Selling arms to populations already impoverished by war and pauperized by conflict is depending upon a market which is in the process of self-destruction.

Yes, were it not so serious, we might laugh; as it is, we can but shake our heads at our own stupidity. Advantages to America of waging benevolent peace were clearly demonstrated during the years immediately following World War II. World conditions are not greatly different today. Once more, history holds a valuable lesson if we will but heed it.