



PRESS RELEASE FROM BRITAIN-PALESTINE APPG

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Scale of UK arms exports licences granted to Israel is breathtaking, says Chair of All Party Parliamentary Group on Britain-Palestine Richard Burden MP

Commenting on the report published by the Committee of Arms Export Control today, Richard Burden MP has expressed concern about the scale of arms and military equipment which the UK government is approving for export to countries with very questionable human rights records, and highlighted that the situation in Israel is of severe concern.

According to the Government's own figures, there are over three thousand approved export licences, worth more than £12 billion, for 'strategic controlled goods' going to 27 Countries listed as of human rights concern by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Chair of the All Party Group on Britain Palestine, Richard Burden MP said:

"Many of the countries on the list are in the Middle East and North Africa. But what is most striking is that over half of the total (£7,878,776,714) is going to "Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories."

Look a little closer and you see that almost all of those exports are going to Israel with only £5539 going to the Occupied Territories.

Look closer still and you see something utterly astonishing. 380 different licences have been granted for exports of arms and military equipment to Israel. However, £7,765,450,000 of the £7.8 billion worth of equipment exported to Israel is covered by just one licence approval – for equipment employing cryptography and software for equipment employing cryptography.

This is bizarre, particularly as there are scores of other licences granted for export of cryptography equipment and software which have a substantial value – but still only add up to a tiny fraction of this amount.

I am tabling questions to Minister today to find out just what this licence was all about. Is just one company involved? Why does the scale of this licence dwarf all others with similar titles? What does the contact actually involve?

Quite apart from all the questions that this particular licence approval raises, there has to be real concern that the arms trade with Israel dominates the list produced by UK Government to this extent. Britain has long standing rules that arms and military equipment should not be exported to countries where they are likely to be used for either internal repression or external aggression, a principle that the Foreign Secretary affirmed to the Committee.

That being the case, you cannot ignore that the West Bank remains illegally occupied by Israel and that there is growing international concern about Israel's treatment of Palestinian child prisoners. You cannot ignore the Israel's military blockade of Gaza, or the regular shootings of Palestinian civilians by Israeli forces which has been systematically documented by the United Nations.

Against a background of international concern about Israel, we need to know why inventory of equipment the UK is supplying ranges from components for assault rifles and arms to military communications equipment and intelligence software. The UK Government regularly expresses concern about Israel's breaches of international law and human rights abuses. So just what are we doing supplying Israel with the military equipment that helps it carrying on such violations?

The UK Government has some serious questions to answer here – on its arms exports to Israel and to the other countries of concern.”

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The Committees on Arms Export Controls (CAEC) consists of four House of Commons Select Committees which meet together to consider the control of strategic exports, including weapons. The Committees involved are: Business, Innovation and Skills, Defence, Foreign Affairs and International Development. Richard Burden MP represents the International Development Committee. The Chairman of CAEC is Sir John Stanley MP, who is a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee.
2. The Committees on Arms Export Controls will publish their latest Report on Wednesday 17 July 2013. The report and evidence is available online in three volumes at www.parliament.uk/caecomm.
3. The Committee's Report scrutinises the Government's quarterly information on arms export licences, arms export control legislation and procedures, organisational and operational issues, Arms Export Agreements, Arms Control Agreements, arms export control policies, and arms exports to countries of concern.
4. To read Richard Burden's article on the report, and more information on Richard's report, visit his website at - www.richardburden.com