



RICHARD BURDEN MP

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PRESS RELEASE

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Arms export licences are undermining UK's human rights policy, says Richard Burden MP

As the House of Commons Committee on Arms Exports report is published today, Richard Burden MP has stated that the UK's human rights policy is being fundamentally undermined by the scale and nature of arms exports licences being approved by the Government – and that the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestine Territories is of severe concern.

The Committee found that there are over three thousand Government 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. These goods include a wide range of items that could be used for military purposes, torture or capital punishment, or for developing chemical, biological or nuclear weapons.

The Committee's 2013 report analyses the Government's arms exports and arms control policies and practices in unprecedented depth and detail. Richard said:

"For the first time, the Committee has detailed the number, value and nature of export licences for the 27 countries that are designated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to be of 'human rights concern'.

It is highly concerning to see the number and value of licences going to countries that we know are not respecting the human rights of their own and neighbouring populations. These include Israel, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Burma and China, and other countries such as Bahrain – where there are severe grounds for concern.

We concluded that it is fundamentally anomalous that some countries of human rights concern – such as Saudi Arabia and Libya – have actually been designated as 'priority markets' for UK trade and investment within the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

This report reveals a major contradiction between the Government's arms exports and human rights policies. I welcome Foreign Secretary William Hague's statement that the Government 'will not issue licences where we judge there is a clear risk the proposed export might provoke or prolong regional or internal conflicts, or (...) facilitate internal repression.' But I think many people reading this report will question whether granting licences for strategic controlled authoritarian regimes on this scale is the 'right judgement' for the UK."

As Chair of the Britain Palestine All Party Parliamentary Group, Richard Burden has also raised specific concerns on the scale of arms export licences to Israel. He commented:

"The value of arms export licences going to Israel - £7.8 of the 12 billion total – is breathtaking. When there are severe international concerns about the Israeli occupation in the West Bank, we need to know why licences are being granted for military communications, vehicles, small arms and pistols, body armour, naval vessels, and cryptography on this scale. I will be pressing the government on this issue further."

The Committee's report calls for stronger regulation and greater transparency on strategic arms export licences by the Government, in addition to tougher action on arms brokers and companies and individuals registered in the UK but engaged in overseas arms export activity that would be illegal in this country.

The report also scrutinises the Government's arms export control legislation and procedures, organisational and operational issues, Arms Export Agreements and Arms Control Agreements such as the UN Arms Trade Treaty of 2013 - the first ever international arms trade treaty.

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NOTES TO 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. CAEC is tasked with scrutinising the UK Government's arms export control procedures and legislation, individual arms export licence decisions, arms export policies, and the UK's role in international arms control agreements.
3. 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.
4. To read Richard Burden's article on the report, and his press release expressing concern about the scale of arms export licences to Israel, visit his website at - www.richardburden.com