

Britain Admits Selling \$12 Billion in Weapons to Israel

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Journalists love rows. We love them so much that we often let them distract us.

Last week was no exception. Fascinated by an apparent [bust-up](#) between Israel and the European Union, most Middle East analysts (myself included) missed a very important story: Britain's arms sales to Israel are far higher than David Cameron's government has previously confessed.

Data published in a [new report](#) from the House of Commons in London states the value of all British military exports to Israel currently being processed comes to £7.9 billion (\$12.1 billion).

This data was supplied by Vince Cable, Britain's business secretary, who oversees the weapons trade.

I had to do a double-take when reading this information as until now Britain has indicated that the value of its arms sales to Israel are measured in millions, rather than billions.

Each year, the EU issues a report on weapons exports for the entire Union, based on information provided by its individual governments. These reports stated that Britain approved military export licenses for Israel worth €5.7 million in [2011](#) and €7.2 million in [2010](#).

Taken at face value, the annual reports suggest that Britain has reduced its weapons exports to Israel since Operation Cast Lead, the murderous three-week attack on Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009. During 2008, Britain [authorized](#) weapons sales of €31.5 million to Israel, according to its official data.

Discrepancy

Because I was puzzled by the huge discrepancy between all these statistics, I asked Vince Cable's department to help me out. I didn't get a clear answer. But a spokesperson speculated that the gap could be explained by how the yearly figures may not cover equipment that "hasn't been shipped out yet."

The latest data, on the other hand, could relate to licenses that have been "granted but not fully executed," the spokesperson added.

A more plausible explanation, in my view, is that the British government — both under Cameron and his Labour Party predecessors, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair — has been dishonest about the full scale of its weapons sales to Israel. Pressure from some diligent members of Parliament might have finally led Cable to provide them with more comprehensive figures.

The Commons' report doesn't go into much detail about the type of military equipment involved. It is telling, nonetheless, that the [largest single deal](#) itemized for Israel involved more than £7.7 billion worth of cryptographic technology.

“Battle-tested”

As far as I can see, there is no accompanying information about this contract — not even a date for when it was rubber-stamped. But anyone familiar with the nature of the Israeli economy should be able to make an educated guess about what is going on.

Israel has exploited the opportunities afforded by occupying the land of another people in order to develop a world-class “homeland security” sector. Israel's drones are the best-known example of innovations routinely “battle-tested” — a term favored by arms traders — on Palestinian civilians.

Britain, it seems, is providing cartloads of sophisticated material to Israeli entrepreneurs intent on perpetuating the crimes of apartheid and occupation. If I'm wide of the mark, then I challenge Cable to spell out what exactly he and his predecessors have approved.

Despite the large sums involved, this new data does not give the full picture about military cooperation with Israel. Exports of components from Britain to America's weapons industry are excluded, as far as I can tell, even though there's a strong chance they will end up in Israeli hands.

Nor does the new data deal with how Britain is an important customer for Israeli weapons. Elbit, a leading Israeli warplane manufacturer, is assembling a series of drones for use by the British Army under the £700 million [Watchkeeper](#) program. Elbit is among the Israeli companies [scheduled to take part](#) in the world's largest weapons fair in London this September.

There can be no excuse for any military cooperation with Israel. An [EU law on arms exports](#) makes it clear that weapons should not be sold if they are likely to facilitate repression or aggravate tensions in a particular region.

Brazen

Britain's foreign ministry has named Israel as one of 27 “[countries of concern](#)” for human rights abuses. Of those 27, Israel is the largest destination for British arms exports. Saudi Arabia — long thought to be the biggest client for Britain's weapons industry — is actually in second place.

The brazen effrontery of the British establishment was on display again today, when it convinced other EU governments to [blacklist](#) Hizballah as a “terrorist” organization. The move was taken at the behest of Israel, which alleges that Hizballah was behind a bombing in Bulgaria last year.

The EU has been willing to swallow Israel’s version of events — even though the Union’s own police agency Europol has [acknowledged](#) there is no proof of Hizballah’s involvement. Reports of a major rift between the EU and Israel — as many a headline indicated last week — are, therefore, exaggerated.

Without question, Hizballah has done things that can be considered criminal — especially in Syria. Yet there would be no Hizballah if it wasn’t for Israeli aggression towards Lebanon.

Hizballah is a symptom of the problems in the Middle East. Britain, on the other hand, is the cause.

It was Britain’s political establishment which “gifted” Palestine to the Zionist movement in 1917. All these years later, Britain is arming Israel to the teeth.

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