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Who does Israel sell arms to? The Defense Ministry won't tell

Even though most of them are already known, Israel refuses to disclose the full list of recipients to avoid a debate over the morality of selling arms to autocratic regimes.

By Aluf Benn | Jan. 9, 2014 | 2:11 PM | 10

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Elbit's Hermes 900 drone. Photo by Elbit Systems

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The Defense Ministry objects to any transparency or openness about

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Israeli arms sales, despite the serious failures that have recently been revealed in its export control department, [as reported in Haaretz by Gili Cohen](#), and the recent forced resignation of department head Meir Shalit. The ministry almost always refrains from launching criminal investigations of exporters who break the law, preferring to settle the cases with administrative fines – or in other words, behind closed doors in the Defense Ministry, without anything being revealed.

Now, the ministry is fighting a petition to the court by attorney Eitay Mack seeking publication of the names of the countries that bought arms from Israel. Its excuse, as always, is that this secrecy is necessary for security: The customers demand it, and if they don't get it, Israel's defense exports will be harmed. The customers can't be asked to confirm this, since their names are classified, so the court is simply being asked to trust the ministry and reject the petition.

The ministry's response to the court – that Israel sold arms in 2011-12 to the United States, Spain, Kenya, Britain and South Korea, but its other customers can't be named – seems like a bad joke. First, the ministry itself boasts of the great achievements of Israel's defense industry and the billions of dollars of business it does worldwide. Second, every international defense journal or website reports at length on the deals of Israel's defense companies.

But you don't even have to rely on media reports: Just a few months ago, an official [British government report](#) revealed a much longer list of countries that bought weaponry from Israeli companies. To get permits to buy British components for their products, the Israeli companies had to tell the British authorities which country was buying the product.

The British report, covering the years 2008-12, listed India, Singapore, Turkey, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, Sweden, Portugal, United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Colombia, Holland, Italy, Germany, Spain, Thailand, Macedonia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Switzerland, Ecuador, Mexico, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Equatorial Guinea, Poland, Argentina and Egypt as Israeli customers. Even countries that have no official relations with Israel appeared on the list: Pakistan, Algeria, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco. The report also said Britain refused to approve components for products destined for Russia, Sri Lanka, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. In total, that's 41 countries, and there are others not listed in the British report.

The Defense Ministry wants to conceal the full list to avoid a public debate over the morality of selling arms to dictatorial regimes, as well as over the worrying failures of its export control division. The court must demand hard evidence that publishing the names of these countries – most of which are known anyway – will really undermine national security, and not just the bureaucratic convenience of ministry inspectors.

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