

## Israel's (In)Security Business

by Giulia Amoroso

Israel is commonly perceived as an international security powerhouse, a country punching well above its weight in the realm of high-tech weaponry and military technologies. Much of this expertise has been developed through close partnerships with the US, but Israel's own domestic capabilities have gradually emerged as market leaders in certain domains, at times even competing with US manufacturers in the global arms market.

Israel's arms exports made headlines recently in the wake of reports that Israel was supplying Myanmar with high-tech weaponry, including speed boats, surveillance equipment and small arms in the midst of that country's violent crackdown against the Rohingya Muslim minority. Events in Myanmar have been described as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UN News Centre, UN Human Rights Chief Points to 'Textbook Example of Ethnic Cleansing' in Myanmar, 11 September 2017, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57490>.

by the head of the United Nations Human Rights Council, and Israel's military sales, including the training of Myanmar's special forces, are in clear violation of a US and EU arms embargo on Myanmar.

Representatives of the State of Israel dismissed the sale as a "purely diplomatic" matter.<sup>2</sup> "The two sides" in Myanmar "are conducting war crimes", was the explanation given by another Israeli diplomat intent on holding damage control meetings with concerned US rabbis, over 300 of which have signed a petition calling on the Israeli government to end its dealings with Myanmar.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "Israel is Arming Criminals", in *Haaretz*, 27 September 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/1.814469>.

<sup>3</sup> Chaim Levinson, "Israel's Explanation for Arming Myanmar during Ethnic Cleansing Campaign: 'Both Sides Committing War Crimes'", in *Haaretz*, 9 November 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.821585>.

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The controversy is only the latest in a series of revelations concerning Israel's arms exports. In mid-August, reports emerged that the Israeli firm, Aeronautics Defence Systems, had preformed a live demonstration of the Orbiter 1K UAV "suicide" drone in Azerbaijan, targeting a manned Armenian military position. While the drone reportedly missed its target, and the Israeli government subsequently froze the export license pending an internal investigation,<sup>4</sup> the incident demonstrates the extent some will go to ensure customer satisfaction in the lucrative arms sector.

Israel first entered the top ten ranking of global arms exporters in the late 1980s and throughout the Cold War Israeli weapons have been used across Central and Southern America, Africa and East Asia, often with tacit US approval.<sup>5</sup> Today, Israel is still ranked as the tenth arms exporter in the world, with exports rising to 6.5 billion dollars in 2016.<sup>6</sup> India has emerged as a major Israeli client (41 percent of total exports between 2012-2016)<sup>7</sup> and European states have increased their military imports from Israel for four years in a row, reaching 1.8 billion dollars in 2016, according to Israeli figures.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Kavitha Surana, "Israel Freezes Export of Suicide Drones to Azerbaijan after Allegation of Abuse", in *Foreign Policy online*, 30 August 2017, <http://atfp.co/2vFDwJb>.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, "How Israel's Economy Got Hooked on Selling Arms Abroad", in *The New York Times*, 7 December 1986, <https://nyti.ms/2i26fXb>.

<sup>6</sup> Aude Fleurant et al., "Trends in International Arms Transfers", in *SIPRI Fact Sheets*, February 2017, p. 2, <https://www.sipri.org/node/3991>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ora Cohen and Gill Cohen, "Record Europe Sales Push Israeli Defense Exports to \$6.5 Billion

Security (or rather insecurity) has therefore become a major Israeli selling point. Ultimately, such sales are considered key to Israel's national security, helping to break Israel's diplomatic isolation while boosting Israel's defence and high-tech sectors, traditional pillars of the Israeli economy.

Israel's booming arms industry is upheld through public expenditure and agreements that bestow Israel significant preferential treatment when it comes to the use of US military aid, totalling 127.4 billion dollars in current non-inflation-adjusted dollars as of December 2016.<sup>9</sup> Israel spends 4.5 percent of its GDP on research and development (R&D), with 30 percent of that reserved to products of a military nature.<sup>10</sup> Israel's defence budget hovers around 18 billion dollars and Israel is the only country allowed to spend a portion (26.3 percent) of annual US military aid to fund its domestic arms sector.<sup>11</sup> Israel's defence industry has also benefitted from generous grants and R&D funding as a result of Israel's inclusion under the EU's research programmes (the Fp7 and Horizon2020 programmes).<sup>12</sup>

in 2016", in *Haaretz*, 29 March 2017, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.780198>

<sup>9</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, "U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel", in *CRS Reports*, No. RL33222 (22 December 2016), p. i, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33222.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Yaakov Katz, "Why Israel Has the Most Technologically Advanced Military on Earth", in *New York Post*, 29 January 2017, <http://nyp.st/2jJffvK>.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, "U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel", *cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ben Hayes, "How the EU Subsidies Israel's Military-Industrial Complex", in *openDemocracy*, 6 March 2013, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/node/71339>.

Described by some as “the Harvard of antiterrorism”,<sup>13</sup> since the end of the Cold War Israeli exports are also gaining momentum in the fields of homeland security, cyber intelligence and law enforcement. Israeli techniques have been used to train Indian troops and Chinese police and Canada is seeking to strengthen cooperation with Israel on public safety issues. Many US cities are using Israeli-established techniques and even Europe is turning its attention to Israeli-developed technologies. Israeli companies are exporting their “border business”<sup>14</sup> to Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Donald Trump’s United States, and promotional material from Israel’s Magal-S3 company lists over 60 countries as having acquired Israeli-made surveillance technology.<sup>15</sup>

A further, albeit less conventional, example of Israel’s security business revolves around counter-terrorism and security training courses tailored towards the private sector and tourism industry. One such example is the Caliber 3 camp, which attracts between 15,000-25,000 visitors every year and is located in the occupied West Bank, in the settlement bloc of Gush Etzion directly south of Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> The many

certifications posted to the Caliber 3 website are proof of the camp’s connections with the Israeli political, military and financial establishment.<sup>17</sup> Images and promotional videos extoll the values of the IDF, long described as the “most moral army in the world”, while the representation of targets in training courses are often self-explanatory: Arab-looking, sometimes wearing the traditional white and black Palestinian keffiyeh, and intent on taking hostages or simply blowing things up.

There is no questioning the many security challenges faced by Israel. Yet, such practices also serve the mutually reinforcing goals of boosting Israeli exports and commercial relationships while reinforcing a narrative of isolation and insecurity among Israeli supporters and the Jewish diaspora.

While the former serves an important diplomatic and political objective – that of winning over new allies with the ultimate hope of breaking Israel’s isolation in international fora such as the United Nations – the latter serves a more subtle, psychological goal; that of boosting support from the Jewish diaspora as well as non-Jewish supporters by polishing Israel’s credentials as a pro-Western “Sparta” located in a sea of turmoil and insecurity that is the Middle East. This latter objective is becoming more urgent in light of the growing disenchantment of large sections of the Jewish diaspora vis-à-vis Israel, particularly among new generations in the US, who do not hold direct memories of the Holocaust

<sup>13</sup> Sari Horwitz, “Israeli Experts Teach Police on Terrorism”, in *The Washington Post*, 12 June 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2005/06/12/israeli-experts-teach-police-on-terrorism/8cc7830c-df28-4ac1-8bf1-17bc0d3fda28>.

<sup>14</sup> Naomi Zeveloff, “Israeli Builders behind Gaza Wall See Growth in Europe, Africa and Trump”, in *Forward*, 3 August 2016, <http://forward.com/news/israel/346734>.

<sup>15</sup> See the Magal Security System website: *Representative Client List*, November 2015, <http://www.magal-s3.com/54550.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Judi Maltz, “Anti-Terror Fantasy Camps are Popping throughout Israel and the West Bank - and Tourists are Eating It Up”, in *Haaretz*, 11 July 2017,

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.800375>.

<sup>17</sup> See the Caliber 3 website: *About Us*, <http://www.caliber3range.com/About-Us>.

or Israel's military exploits during the Cold War and are rather alienated by the growing dominance of the nationalist-religious right in Israeli politics.

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, hinted at these twin objectives during his speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2016: "More and more nations in Asia, in Africa, in Latin America [...] see Israel as a potent partner – a partner in fighting the terrorism of today, a partner in developing the technology of tomorrow."<sup>18</sup>

In essence, Israeli leaders hope that a new period of heightened tensions and international volatility will allow them to sidestep the fundamental driver for Israel's diplomatic isolation: the 50-year-old occupation of Palestine. This objective was clearly visible in Netanyahu's scathing attack on the European Union during a closed door meeting with Eastern European leaders in Budapest last July. Apparently unaware he was being recorded, Netanyahu lamented that "The European Union is the only association of countries in the world that conditions relations with Israel, which produces technology in every area, on political conditions. The only ones! Nobody does it. [...] It's crazy. It's actually crazy."<sup>19</sup>

Such statements reflect Israel's growing confidence – or *hutzpah* – in believing

<sup>18</sup> UN, *Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu's Speech at the United Nations General Assembly*, 22 September 2016, <https://gadebate.un.org/en/71/israel>.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Beaumont, "Nethanyahu Attack on EU Policy towards Israel Caught on Microphone", in *The Guardian*, 19 July 2017, <https://gu.com/p/6ptz6>.

that the tide has finally turned on Israel's international isolation. Israel's booming high-tech, security and counter-terrorism industry are adding to a belief that "time is on Israel's side" and that the era of linkage between Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and its foreign diplomatic relationships is coming to an end. Little matter that Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, not to mention its militarized policies in the Arab world – most notably the 1982 invasion of Lebanon and gruelling siege of Beirut – have been (and remain) significant drivers for regional instability and radicalization, including for Al-Qaeda's founder, Osama Bin Laden.

Yet, the overbearing influence of Israel's "military-industrial complex" is leading to erroneous assumptions that security responses exist to a whole number of non-security related challenges. Even Israel's key ally the United States has repeatedly warned that billions in military aid and steadfast US politico-diplomatic support will not be enough to ensure Israel's long-term security and survival. Such warnings have fallen on deaf ears. Declarations by Netanyahu that Israel "will forever live by the sword"<sup>20</sup> demonstrate the corrosive effects of Israel's military-industrial complex is having on politics, one that can hardly pave the way for meaningful dialogue, let alone compromise or the ultimate attainment of security.

Rather, such approaches are likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy,

<sup>20</sup> "Netanyahu: 'We Will Forever Live by the Sword', Indefinitely Control All Palestinian Territory", in *MintPress News*, 27 October 2015, <http://www.mintpressnews.com/?p=210700>.

condemning Israel – and its neighbours – to a black hole of insecurity that only serves to reinforce the hold of Israel's military-industrial complex whose relationship with Israel's political elites depends precisely on the promotion of a siege mentality which in turn ensures ample leeway (and funding) to Israel's military sector.

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