

# Israel's Arms

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Two separate episodes, which occurred in September 2009, can shed a light on Israel's policy of arms sales. The first was the "secret" visit of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Moscow to meet with Russian leaders. Mr. Netanyahu discussed with his hosts the Iranian nuclear program — which, understandably, is of deep concern to Israel — and tried also to persuade them to reverse their decision to sell Tehran the Russian-made anti-aircraft missile defense S-300. The second episode

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was the visit of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman to five major African nations. While the proclaimed aim of his tour was the discussion of malnutrition, hunger, and disease in Africa, Lieberman and his entourage dealt with less humanitarian and elevated subjects and laid the groundwork for future weapons deals.

The two episodes illustrate Israel's problematic and controversial behavior: On the one hand it is asking the world to take into consideration its security needs. On the other hand Israel itself shows no consideration of other nations' concerns. Israel preaches morality, values, and ideals, and it portrays itself as the only democracy in the Middle East. Yet behind the scenes it is involved in murky and dubious arms deals.

The request that Russia refrains from selling arms to Iran in particular demonstrates a measure of chutzpa and hypocrisy. Israel has surpassed Russia already in 2008 as the world's third largest arms exporter. Israel has (almost) no inhibitions in selling weapons on the global market. And, in fact, Israel ignored Russian protests when it equipped the country of Georgia with military hardware, technology, and military training.

Nevertheless, one shouldn't be so naïve as to ask Israel to be an exception to the dominant rule, or to become a role model. The dream and aspiration of the founding fathers of the Jewish state, rooted in the ideals of the prophets to become "a light to nations," have long ago faded and crashed on the hard surface of Middle East political and military reality. But one might have expected Israel to play down its rule in this shady

and dark business. Instead of showing some remorse and justifying its arms sales policy as a necessity, Israel prides itself on and boasts about becoming a leading power in the field.

With arms sales of between \$4–7 billion annually in the last five years, Israel positioned itself as the third largest arms exporter after the U.S. and France, and before world powers such as the U.K., Russia, China, or India.

It all started modestly and humbly. During the first 20 years of its independence, Israel had difficulties finding sources of military supplies to satisfy its legitimate defense needs. After approval from the then Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, Czechoslovakia provided Israel with airplanes, weapons, and ammunition, which turned the balance in Israel's favor in its struggle against the Arab invading armies in the 1948–9 War of Independence. But once the Soviet Union realized that Israel would not become another "socialist" satellite, it abandoned Israel in the early 1950s and Israel was forced to search for new suppliers. The West was a natural candidate. But having strong oil interests in the Arab world, both the U.S. and Britain rejected Israeli appeals. Eventually, temporary and limited mutual interests formed a French–Israeli alliance. It lasted for more than a decade and resulted in the 1956 conspiracy (together with the U.K.) to invade Egypt during the Suez War. France continued the cooperation by providing Israel with its nuclear reactor and weapons. But the "Bridge over the Mediterranean," as the French–Israeli alliance was dubbed, ended after Israel found itself in another round of war with its Arab neighbors. France declared an arms embargo on Israel in 1967 and refused to honor its commitments.

The 1967 Six Day War turned out to be a watershed in Israeli history for several reasons, among them: a smashing victory over the Arab states and the occupation of Arab territories, a rise in economic prosperity, and the replacement of France with the U.S. as its major political patron and arms supplier. Still, Israel realized that it had to develop its own small military industry to ensure that its needs would be met should an arms embargo recur. Originally the aim was to research and develop state-of-the-art sophisticated systems, enabling the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to maintain a


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technological edge over its Arab adversaries, especially those systems that Israel couldn't purchase from the Americans. Nowadays Israel is manufacturing missiles, tanks, boats, aviation systems, artillery, rifles, ammunition, and intelligence equipment.

Over time the *raison d'être* for the weapons industry changed. The scope and the range of the Israeli military-industrial complex extended and its mission turned upside down. When the cost of research and development skyrocketed, the IDF justified the expense by seeking markets in which to sell its military merchandise. Since the 1980s, the Israeli military industry has been hiring more workers and salesmen, who travel the world offering Israel's "battle-proven" goods.

The name of the game, sanctioned by the Israeli Ministry of Defense and government, was commerce — at any cost. Israel, it was

claimed, needed to produce weapons and military systems not only for its defense needs but also for economic reasons: to gain hard currency, to provide work, and to sustain a larger workforce. "If we don't do it the British, French, South Africans, Russians, Ukrainians, and others will fill the gap." A new brand of Israelis surfaced and prospered: arms dealers, middlemen, security advisors, and military experts. Restrictions were lifted. Weapons were sold to Israel's enemies such as Iran in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Israeli weapons found their ways to fuel civil wars in Africa and to support dictators in Asia and South America.

In the meantime Israel's reputation has been stained and involvement in conflicts has given Israel a bad name. With good intentions Israel gave birth to an industry that suddenly and unintentionally turned into an uncontrolled beast that has to be fed. 

## A Canadian Perspective on Gun Control

MIRIAM KRAMER AND AARON LEVY

In the three years since we moved from New York to Toronto, we've been asked countless times, in all seriousness: "Isn't it dangerous in the United States?" We laugh each time at the seeming absurdity, the way our Canadian colleagues relate to America with the same fear that Americans usually reserve for developing nations engaged in active civil war.

The frequency of the question seems to stem from many Canadians thinking of America as a gun-loving, gun-toting country with dangerous, crime-ridden cities. Conversely, many Americans regard Canada (okay, most Americans never really think about Canada, but among those who do) as a liberal, safe haven where everyone, including people who live in urban centers, leaves his or her doors unlocked. Of course, neither of these oversimplifications is true. Americans own guns and Canadians own guns. Each country has its relatively safe cities and its less-safe cities and each country has crime and gun-related violence. But is there any truth to the generalization that Canada is much safer than the U.S.?

It would seem so: the U.S. has a substantially higher rate of gun-related crimes each year compared to Canada. In 2004, there were about six firearm homicides per 100,000 people in the U.S.; in Canada less than two per 100,000.

Why does Canada have one third the gun violence of the U.S.?

### Reason One: Gun Prevalence

The U.S. has more guns overall, with 200 million civilian firearms in 2004 among a total population of 293 million people (or 68,259 guns per 100,000 people), compared to seven million civilian firearms among 32 million Canadians in the same year (21,875 guns per 100,000 people). In other words, there are three times more guns per person in the U.S. than in Canada.

### Reason Two: Gun Type

While in both countries the overwhelming majority of gun-related crimes were committed using a handgun, America has a higher proportion of handguns as opposed to long guns or rifles, types of guns used for hunting and other recreational purposes. There are approximately 80 million handguns in the U.S. (comprising 40 percent of all guns) but only one million handguns in Canada (14 percent). Comparing per capita handgun ownership rates is even more striking: some 26 percent of Americans own one or more handguns compared with a mere three percent of Canadians. More handguns lead to more gun-related crime.

While it's possible that Canadians feel less

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