

Wapenhandel en militaire samenwerking met Israel / Arms trade and military cooperation with Israel. Mark Akkerman, October 2007

English summary

Dutch policy on arms trade with Israel is ambiguous. On the one hand, there is a restrictive export policy since the start of the second Intifadah in 2002. Arms export licences are 'in principle' not granted for Israel, in line with criteria two (human rights), three (internal conflict) and four (regional conflict) of the European Union code of conduct on arms exports, which is followed by the Dutch government. At the same time, the transport of arms, notably from the United States, through Dutch ports and airports to Israel, is extensive and does not require any licence when originating from a 'friendly nation'. A mere notification is sufficient. Without a licence, arms transfers through Dutch territory escape scrutiny against the EU arms exports criteria, while the United States is known to have a much less restrictive arms export policy towards Israel.

In 2005 and 2006 alone 160 million bullet parts, 17 million ammunition and tens of thousands cartridges, smoke shells and fuses from the United States were transferred through Dutch main airport Schiphol on their way to the Israeli Defence Forces. The transfers continued right through the summer of 2006 when Israel was at war against Lebanon. Because of the permissive attitude of the Dutch authorities Israel has become one of the main arms transfer destinations for Schiphol.

Moreover, the Dutch army imports considerable amounts of weapons from the Israeli defence industry and intensive cooperation exists on company level, notably between Thales Nederland and Rafael in the production of Gill anti-tank missiles. Israel is the 5th biggest arms exporter to developing nations, selling to countries such as Angola, Sri Lanka, the Ivory Coast, Uganda and China, without concern for the human rights records of their customers.

Dutch components of F16 fighters, Apache attack helicopters and Hellfire rockets end up with the Israeli armed forces through co-production agreements with American companies. F16s and Apache helicopters are used in shooting and bombing Palestinian cities. According to a former Israeli general Apache helicopters have also "proven to be a valuable tool in targeted killing operations" which means unlawful liquidations of Hamas leaders. Hellfire rockets are standard equipment for Apache helicopters, also used for destroying Lebanese civilian infrastructure during the 2006 war. For dual use goods the Dutch export policy is also less restrictive. Export licences have been granted for night vision equipment produced in Dutch-Israeli cooperation and for chemicals that could be used for the production of weapons. This includes samples of the poison gas Soman. Unlike the Netherlands Israel is no partner to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Israel has an extensive track record of violations of international law, including the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, as well as a long history of staging military

attacks on its neighbours, including Lebanon and Syria. Therefore the Dutch government should take its own policy more seriously and take on an independent approach. It should impose a complete arms embargo against Israel, including the transit of arms through the Netherlands and the export of components that may end up in Israeli hands.