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Israeli military aid to Burmese regime: Jane's

Submitted by David Bloom on Sat, 09/29/2007 - 20:14.

The Burmese junta currently shooting unarmed protestors received a cynical plea for restraint from the Israel government on Sept. 29. According to the Israeli paper Ha'aretz, the Israeli foreign ministry announced "Israel is concerned by the situation in Myanmar, and urges the government to demonstrate restraint and refrain from harming demonstrators." The article ended by pointing out that "Israel denies selling weapons to Burma or Myanmar." ([Ha'aretz](#), Sept. 29)

Not true, according to a March 1, 2000 [report](#) in the authoritative British publication Jane's Intelligence Review by William Ashton. The article, titled "Myanmar and Israel develop military pact," details how Israeli companies and the Israeli government have been supplying and developing weapons for the Burmese regime, and sharing intelligence:

In August 1997 it was revealed that the Israeli defence manufacturing company [Elbit](#) had won a contract to upgrade Myanmar's (then) three squadrons of Chinese-built F-7 fighters and FT-7 trainers. The F-7 is a derivative of the Mikoyan MiG-21 'Fishbed' jet fighter. The FT-7 is the export version of the GAIC JJ-7, itself a copy of the MiG-21 'Mongol-B' trainer. Since they began to be delivered by China in 1991, the Myanmar Air Force has progressively acquired about 54 (or four squadrons) of these aircraft, the latest arriving at Hmawbi air base only last year. In related sales, the air force has also acquired about 350 PL-2A air-to-air missiles (AAM) from China and at least one shipment of the more sophisticated PL-5 AAMs.

Since their delivery to Myanmar, these new aircraft have caused the air force considerable problems. Several aircraft (and pilots) have already been lost through accidents, raising questions about the

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reliability of the Chinese technology. There have also been reliable reports that the F-7s were delivered without the computer software to permit the AAMs to be fired in flight. Also, the air force has complained that the F-7s are difficult to maintain, in part reflecting major differences between the structure and underlying philosophy of the Myanmar and Chinese logistics systems. Spare parts have been in very short supply. In addition, the air force seems to have experienced difficulties in using the F-7 (designed primarily for air defence) in a ground attack role. These, and other problems, seem to have prompted the air force to turn to Israel for assistance.

According to sources in the international arms market, 36 of Myanmar's F-7 fighters are to be retro-fitted with the Elta EL/M-2032 air-to-air radar, Rafael Python 3 infrared, short range AAMs, and Litening laser designator pods. The same equipment will also be installed on the two-seater FT-7 fighter trainers. In a related deal, Israel will also sell Myanmar at least one consignment of laser-guided bombs. Since the Elbit contract was won in 1997, the air force has acquired at least one more squadron of F-7 and FT-7 aircraft from China, but it is not known whether the Israeli-backed upgrade programme will now be extended to include the additional aircraft. Myanmar's critical shortage of foreign exchange will be a major factor in the SPDC's decision.

The army has also benefited from Myanmar's new closeness to Israel.

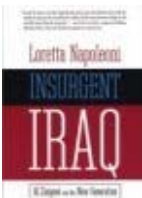
As part of the regime's massive military modernisation and expansion programme, considerable effort has been put into upgrading the army's artillery capabilities. In keeping with its practice of never abandoning any equipment of value, the army clearly still aims, as far as possible, to keep older weapons operational. (Pakistan, for example, has recently provided Myanmar with ammunition for its vintage 25 pounder field guns). The older UK, US and Yugoslav guns in the Tatmadaw's [Myanmar Armed Forces] inventory have been supplemented



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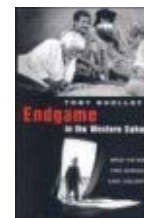
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over the past 10 years with a range of new towed and self-propelled artillery pieces. Purchased mainly from China, they include 122mm howitzers, anti-tank guns, 57mm Type 80 anti-aircraft guns, 37mm Type 74 anti-aircraft guns and 107mm Type 63 multiple rocket launchers. In a barter deal brokered by China last year, the SPDC has also managed to acquire about 16 130mm artillery pieces from North Korea. Despite all this new firepower, however, the army has still looked to Israel to help equip its new artillery battalions.



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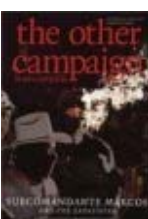


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Around 1998 Myanmar negotiated the purchase of 16 155mm Soltam towed howitzers, possibly through a third party like Singapore. These guns are believed to be second-hand pieces no longer required by the Israel Defence Force. Last year, ammunition for these guns (including high explosive and white phosphorous rounds) was ordered from Pakistan's government ordnance factories. Before the purchase of these new Chinese and North Korean weapons, Myanmar's largest artillery pieces were 105mm medium guns, provided by the USA almost 40 years ago. Acquiring the Israeli weapons thus marks a major capability leap for Myanmar's army gunners. It is possible that either Israel or Pakistan has provided instructors to help the army learn to use and maintain these new weapons.

Nor has the Myanmar Navy missed out on Israeli assistance. There have been several reports that Israel is playing a crucial role in the construction and fitting out of three new warships, currently being built in Yangon.

Myanmar's military leaders have long wanted to acquire two or three frigates to replace the country's obsolete PCE-827 and Admirable- class corvettes, decommissioned in 1994, and its two 1960s-vintage Nawarat-class corvettes, which have been gradually phased out since 1989. As military ties with China rapidly grew during the 1990s, the SLORC hoped to buy two or three Jiangnan- or even Jianghu-class frigates, but it could not afford even the special 'friendship' prices being asked by Beijing. As



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a compromise, the SPDC has now purchased three Chinese hulls, and is currently fitting them out as corvettes in Yangon's Sinmalaik shipyard.

According to reliable reports, the three vessels will each be about 75m long and displace about 1,200 tons. Despite a European Community embargo against arms sales to Myanmar, the ships' main guns are being imported (apparently through a third party) from Italy. Based on the information currently available, they are likely to be 76mm OTO Melara Compact guns, weapons which (perhaps coincidentally) have been extensively combat-tested by the Israeli Navy on its Reshef- class fast attack missile patrol boats. The corvettes will probably also be fitted with anti-submarine weapons, but it is not known what, if any, surface-to-surface and SAMs the ships will carry.

Israel's main role in fitting out the three corvettes is apparently to provide their electronics suites. Details of the full contract are not known, but it is expected that each package will include at least a surface-search radar, a fire-control radar, a navigation radar and a hull-mounted sonar.

The first of these warships will probably be commissioned and commence sea trials later this year.

Only sales or a strategic imperative?

While Myanmar remains a pariah state, subject to comprehensive sanctions by the USA and European Community, it is unlikely that Israel will ever admit publicly to having military links with the Tatmadaw. Until it does, the reasons for Israel's secret partnership with the Yangon regime will remain unclear. A number of factors, however, have probably played a part in influencing policy decisions in Tel Aviv.

There is clearly a strong commercial imperative behind some of these ventures. From a regional base in Singapore, with which it shares a very close relationship,

Israel has already managed to penetrate the lucrative Chinese arms market. It is now aggressively seeking new targets for sales of weapons and military equipment in the Asia-Pacific. These sales are sometimes supported by offers of technology transfers and specialised advice. This approach has led to fears among some countries that Israel will introduce new military capabilities into the region which could encourage a mini arms race, as others attempt to catch up. The weapon systems being provided to the Myanmar armed forces are not that new, and the Asian economic crisis has dramatically reduced the purchasing power of many regional countries, but Israel's current activities in Myanmar will add to those concerns.

Given the nature of some of these sales, and other probable forms of military assistance to Myanmar, these initiatives would appear to enjoy the strong support of the Israeli government. In addition to the ever-present trade imperative, one reason for this support could be a calculation by senior Israeli officials that closer ties to Myanmar could reap diplomatic and intelligence dividends. For example, Myanmar is now a full member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which, despite the economic crisis, is still a major force in a part of the world which has received much closer attention from strategic analysts since the end of the Cold War. Israel's regional base will remain Singapore, but it is possible that Tel Aviv believes Myanmar can provide another avenue for influence in ASEAN, and a useful vantage point from which to monitor critical strategic developments in places like China and India.

In particular, Israel is interested in the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and the transfer of technologies related to the development of ballistic and other missiles. Myanmar has close military relations with China and Pakistan, both of which have been accused of transferring sensitive weapons technologies to rogue Islamic states, such as Iran. Myanmar is also a neighbour of India,

another nuclear power that has resisted international pressure to curb its proliferation activities. Yangon could thus be seen by Israel as a useful listening post from which to monitor and report on these countries.

Also, despite accusations over the years that Myanmar has developed chemical and biological weapons, and more convincing arguments that Israel has a sizeable nuclear arsenal of its own, both countries share an interest in preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Myanmar's support for anti-proliferation initiatives, in multilateral forums like the UN General Assembly and the Committee on Disarmament, would seem to be worth a modest investment by the Israeli government in bilateral relations with the SPDC. **In addition to training Myanmar agriculturalists in Israel, assisting the Tatmadaw to upgrade its military capabilities seems a sure way of getting close to the Yangon regime.**

Israel's repeated denial of any military links with Myanmar are not unexpected. Israel has never liked advertising such ties, particularly with countries like Myanmar, South Africa and China, which have been condemned by the international community for gross abuses of human rights. Even Israel's very close military ties with Singapore are routinely denied by both sides. Yet there seems little room for doubt that, after the 1988 takeover, Israel did start to develop close links with the SLORC, which are continuing to grow under the SPDC. In these circumstances, it would be surprising if Israel was not still looking for opportunities to restore the kind of mutually beneficial bilateral relationship that was first established when both countries became independent modern states in 1948.

It is noteworthy that Elbit Systems is one of the Israeli companies involved in Myanmar. Elbit supplies electronics used in the separation wall that Israel is building illegally in the occupied Palestinian West Bank, enclosing up to 10% of Palestinian land on the "Israeli" side. **It is ironic that Israel expresses concern about protestors being killed by the Burmese military it**

supplies, when Israel itself has killed ten Palestinians protesting the annexation of large sections of their farmland, and injured hundreds of others, including Israeli and international demonstrators, who have been beaten, arrested and expelled by the Israeli military. ([JPost](#), Sept. 5) Just today in the village of [Bil'in](#) in the West Bank, the Israeli military injured nine non-violent protestors, according to the International Middle East Media Center ([IMEMC](#), Sept. 29)

That the Burmese military has fired into crowds recalls that a month into the second Palestinian intifada, before any armed attacks or shooting came from the Palestinian side, Israeli forces had fired 1.3 million bullets at Palestinians, according to Yitzhak Laor, an Israeli columnist who often writes for Ha'aretz:

A month after the Intifada began, four years ago, Major General Amos Malka, by then No. 3 in the military hierarchy, and until 2001 the head of Israeli military Intelligence (MI), asked one of his officers (Major Kuperwasser) how many 5.56 bullets the Central Command had fired during that month (that is, only in the West Bank). Three years later Malka talked about these horrific figures. **This is what he said to Ha'aretz's diplomatic commentator, Akiva Eldar about the first month of the Intifada, 30 days of unrest, no terrorist attacks yet, no Palestinian shooting:**

Kuperwasser got back to me with the number, 850,000 bullets. My figure was 1.3 million bullets in the West Bank and Gaza. This is a strategic figure that says that our soldiers are shooting and shooting and shooting. I asked: "Is this what you intended in your preparations?" and he replied in the negative. I said: "Then the significance is that we are determining the height of the flames." (Ha'aretz, 11.6.2004).

It was a bullet for every Palestinian child, said one of the officers in that meeting, or at least this is what the Israeli daily Maariv revealed two years ago, when the horrible figures were first leaked. It didn't much

change "public opinion", neither here nor in the West, neither two years ago nor 4 months ago when Malka finally opened his mouth. It read as if it had happened somewhere else, or a long time ago, or as if it was just one version, a voice in a polyphony, hiding behind the principle theme: we, the Israelis are right, and they are wrong.

([Counterpunch](#), Oct. 20, 2004)

See our last post on [Burma](#). See our last post on [Israel/Palestine](#).

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Israeli military aid to Burma?

Submitted by Bill Weinberg on Sat, 09/29/2007 - 22:19.

Not to let Israel off the hook whatsoever, because the SLORC had committed atrocities galore by 2000, but I note that the Jane's report is from seven years ago. The US didn't even impose trade sanctions until '03. Has the Israeli aid continued?

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At least maintained links after 2003, claims Ashton

Submitted by David Bloom on Sun, 09/30/2007 - 09:13.

Ashton wrote the following on July 14, 2004 for [Irawaddy](#):

Several eastern European countries are keen to sell arms to Burma. Also, countries like Singapore, Pakistan and **Israel** maintain close links with Rangoon. All have weapon systems that are on the Tatmadaw's wish list. In the past, these factors have often led to substantial sales of weapons, military equipment and dual use goods

to Burma, and related training contracts.

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Senators link Burma and Israel issues

Submitted by David Bloom on Sun, 09/30/2007 - 09:57.

From [BNI online](#), July 26:

United States Senators are holding up Burma as an example of a country that should draw international attention regarding human rights abuses, as opposed to Israel, in their continuing opposition to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

"The truth is that members of the Council are too busy trying to protect themselves from criticism for their own human rights abuses and taking political shots at Israel," said Republican Senator Norm Coleman of Minnesota on Wednesday. "You've got countries like North Korea, Burma, Zimbabwe where you have state-sponsored brutality, and what we have is deafening silence."

Sen. Coleman, along with Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer, sits as a Congressional Delegate to the United Nations. Sen. Boxer joins Sen. Coleman in condemnation of the Council's work and in advocating that the United States government deny financial support to the Council.

The State Department has also released statements pointing to Burma as one of the "worst of the worst" cases for state-sponsored human rights abuses, while claiming that the Council's

energies are unnecessarily drained by focusing on Israel.

Supporters of withholding funds for the Human Rights Council acknowledge that the absence of 3 million dollars in funds is unlikely to have any significant impact on the workings of the Council, serving instead as a political gesture highlighting the United States position regarding the workings of the Council.

Neither the United States nor Burma is party to the Council.

The House of Representatives has already passed similar legislation.

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More on Israel's role

Submitted by David Bloom on Sun, 09/30/2007 - 20:37.

Sol Salbe, from Middle East News Service, Oct.1:

Einyan Merkazi,
news-israel.net - a source similar to Crikey.com.au in Australia in its earlier years (although somewhat more patriotic) - did not share Haaretz's need to give twice as much space for the denials. While wrongly attributing the item to the most recent issue of Jane's it added:

“The riots in Burma whose name was changed by the junta to Myanmar. are slowly but surely exposing Israel's involvement and its close ties with the dictatorial regime. Once again it becomes evident that Israel is one of the world largest traders in death and weaponry. The Israeli

government does not have any compunction as to identity of its customers. Since the monks uprising commenced several hundred people have been killed and thousands have been arrested. The ruling junta utilises sharpshooters in a similar manner that the IDF uses against armed Palestinian militants on the West Bank in Gaza.” Earlier the web site pointed out that Ambassador Ruth Schatz background is in military intelligence.

The following cartoon is from Ha'aretz. The TV screen is datelined "Gaza." The caption is "Poor Burmese monks."



monks

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