

## Britain Punishes Israel for Gaza Op, Blocks Sale of Ship Parts

by Gil Ronen

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(Israelnationalnews.com) Britain has officially informed Israel's embassy in London that it is revoking five licenses for export of equipment used in the Israel Navy's Sa'ar 4.5 gunships because they violate British and European Union criteria for military sales that could be used for "internal repression".

The move is the only such action to date by a foreign government against Israel, in response to the "Cast Lead" counterterror operation against Hamas in Gaza earlier this year. Israeli officials said the license revocation would have no effect on the IDF and noted that 177 British arms export licenses remain in force.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband told the House of Commons in April that there were "credible" reports that the Sa'ar-class Corvette vessels had been used in "a naval fire support role" as part of Operation Cast Lead.

### 'Not an Embargo'

British sources said that the Sa'ar ships' 76mm guns almost certainly used British components because Britain had previously granted export licenses specifically for these guns. In addition, it allowed exports of cabling for the ships and components for radar that Miliband said could be used for "fire control against surface targets" although its primary role is in air defense.

A statement by the British Embassy in Tel Aviv said: "We do not believe that the current situation in the Middle East would be improved by imposing an arms embargo on Israel. Israel has the right to defend itself and faces real security threats. This said, we consistently urge Israel to act with restraint and supported the [EU] Presidency statement that called the Israeli actions during Operation Cast Lead 'disproportionate.' "

The British Embassy said the move was not an embargo on Israel. "There are no security agreements between the UK and Israel," an embassy spokeswoman said. "UK policy remains to assess all export licenses to Israel against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria." Britain had also revoked some export licenses to Russia and Georgia following their war last year, the embassy spokeswoman added.

### Israel Unfazed

Asked about the British decision on *Voice of Israel* government radio, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said, "Israel has known many cases of embargo in the past. We always knew how to get by, and there is no need to get excited about this."

Israeli officials said the license revocation would have no effect on the country's military and noted that only five of 182 British arms-export licenses to Israel were revoked.

The cancellation of the five licenses follows a review started by the UK Government three months ago of the 182 licenses currently in force for arms exports to Israel.

Miliband acknowledged in April that other British-made components had been exported to U.S. manufacturers of military equipment that was later sold to Israel. These "indirect exports" included equipment for avionics systems used in F-16 fighter jets as well as parts used in the fire control systems of Apache helicopters.

Pro-Arab groups like the Britain Palestine All-Party Commons Group welcomed the decision to revoke the export licenses for parts used in the Sa'ar ships but called for the same criteria to be applied to indirect exports as well.