



ISRAEL AND ARMS EXPORT

One of Religious Zionism's deepest messages is that when we deal with the Jewish character of the State of Israel, we do not focus solely on matters of *bein adam laMakom*. Of course, government laws regarding Shabbat, marriage and divorce, *kashrut* and conversion are staples in the character of a Jewish State. But Torah attention must also be given to the ways in which the country itself is conducted, such as determining socio-economic policy, leading the fight against corruption, etc.

One of the ethical issues at the center of how a Jewish State should be run is the question of the arms industry. Jewish ethics states that *חַיִּיךָ קודֵם לַמַּיִם* – your own life takes priority over the life of anyone else. Therefore, the basis for ethical behavior is for one to first take care of oneself. In national terms, in order to defend itself, the State of Israel must maintain a developed and advanced arms industry, until the days of Mashiach, when “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid.” In the modern world though, to sustain an arms industry demands arms export – to maintain an economic base for the industry, to examine the effectiveness of weapons, for diplomatic purposes, etc.

Does this mean that everything is allowed though? Does *Halacha* not

obligate the Jewish State to limit itself in this area? Doesn't the duty to “do what is good and right in the eyes of G-d” also apply to the export of weapons? To begin with, Jewish law states that it is actually forbidden to sell weapons to non-Jews: “And furthermore, it is taught in a *baraita*: One may not sell weapons or auxiliary equipment to non-Jews, and one may not sharpen weapons for them. And one may not sell them stocks used for fastening the feet of prisoners, or iron neck chains (*kolarin*), or foot chains, or iron chains. This prohibition applies equally to both a non-Jew and a Samaritan” (Masechet Avodah Zarah 15b).

However, the *poskim* allowed the export of weapons for various reasons: 1) national *pikuach nefesh* 2) on condition the sale is to countries that maintain law and order, and uphold the international principles of combat morality, and other reasons. These *heterim* are essential and in keeping with *Halacha* and the foundations of Jewish law. However, there is no *heter* to sell weapons to countries or private entities that violate human rights, or use the weapons they buy to commit war crimes and genocide.

Moreover, the arms export environment is always accompanied by moral decay. Because these transactions are often done “in the dark,” because tremendous amounts of money are involved,

and because dealers are usually former senior officers close to government bodies, these deals are often associated with bribery, corruption and the like. When the State of Israel participates in this type of arms deal, it harms its Jewish character and desecrates Hashem's Name.

Yom HaAtzmaut is a kind of Rosh Hashanah for the State of Israel. This is the right time for introspection; to rejoice in the innumerable good things this country does, but also – as on Rosh Hashanah – to repent and correct what needs to be corrected. Those who follow the path of Torah must participate in the call for the State of Israel to pursue a policy of arms exports according to *Halacha*, within the proper moral and ethical constraints, thereby sowing our deep faith in the vision for the End of Days, when “nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never know war again.”

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