

Who Is Setting The Militaristic Pace?

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ISRAEL is among the most militarised countries in the world. The extensive socio-economic crisis gripping our society is an outgrowth of the escalating arms race: Israeli per capita weapons production is four times that of France. This only forces Israel into greater dependence on US imperialism, particularly its military-industrial complex.

The growing militarisation is siphoning off ever more financial, production, and research resources from civilian sectors into the military ones and bolstering the positions of the domestic military-industrial complex, now a critical factor in the economy and politics. The economic outlook is far from bright, with scientific and technological progress in the civilian sector being held back.

About 60 per cent of Israeli research and development allocations are taken over by the military. The war industry employs roughly 300,000 people, nearly a quarter of the national workforce.

A Source of Tension in the Middle East

The munitions factories are owned by the state, companies within the Histadrut trade union association, as well as foreign, mixed and private capital. Prominent among the latter are US, French, West German, and Belgian companies.

The sector's leading enterprise is the Israel Aircraft Industries owned by the state and manufacturing Arava and Kfir warplanes. Its workforce tops 22,000. The 1987 sales totalled over \$1 billion, with exports accounting for 60 per cent. Two-thirds of the company's output are military items. Other major companies include the Israel Military Industries, Tadiran, Elop, and Soltam. A total of 112 corporations are making weapons, with 12 of them, or one-tenth, accounting for over four-fifths of the lethal output and revealing a high degree of concentration of production.

The military-industrial complex incorporates many other enterprises related to it. Top defence ministry officials and the army command are closely connected with corporation and bank chief executives and the political establishment. Many former high-ranking officers become managers to join boards of directors in the factories. Over the years there has emerged a coterie of the leading military, industrialists, bankers and politicians. *This coalition is a militaristic lobby of sorts, whose elements have like economic concerns and identical political ideas.*

The Israeli complex operates as a junior partner to the US military-industrial complex; the latter works to boost the military industries and swell the Israeli state budget to secure a further increase of its own fabulous profits.

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The militaristic lobby has a critical part in the Zionist establishment. The abortive attempts at a political settlement of the Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict only serve to bolster up the military-industrial complex; for its part, it uses all the influence it has to pursue the policy of occupation, colonisation, and aggression and forward US strategic objectives in the Middle East and worldwide.

The major elements of this complex are giving increasing aid and support to domestic ultra-right and fascist organisations to whip up anti-Arab and anti-Soviet sentiment. The ruling circles continue their policy of expansion and hangs on to the territory captured from the neighbouring Arab states. Israel sees the armed forces as the chief tool to settle conflicts.

The aggressive policy of Israeli rulers projecting the ideologies of the military-industrial complex is making the country increasingly isolated internationally. World press reports often describe Israel as a 'source of tension' fuelling the arms race across the region and beyond.

One argument the military-industrial complex uses while stepping up the arms race is that Israel should not depend entirely on foreign suppliers. Surely, this argument holds no water, since militarisation leads to quite the opposite, to making the country still more dependent on US imperialism.

This was emphasised particularly strongly in the case of the Lavi warplane developed in 1983 under pressure from the US and the Israeli military. The initial cost was set at \$2 billion but successive estimates boosted the figure to a whopping \$9 billion; billions have already been drained by this most costly militaristic venture, to the detriment of civilian research and development. Characteristically, under the terms of the project, the engine, wings and some other major components are being developed and manufactured in the USA.

More recently, the Pentagon, anxious to have Israel buy its F-16 fighters, demanded a halt to the Lavi project, with our pro-militaristic publications reacting to it in a swift and servile manner. The *Ha'arets* newspaper had this comment to make: "For a state like Israel, with an annual gross national product of \$24 billion, it is impossible to shoulder such a burden . . ." The Lavi project was mothballed. In addition to the vast resources already spent, three thousand workers joined the already swollen army of unemployed.

Israel did not think twice in agreeing to join President Reagan's notorious Star Wars programme. Defence minister Itzhak Rabin stressed on the subject that various areas were under consideration, particularly computer and laser production. "We have submitted to the Americans a list of sixty items on which we might help one another . . . Taking part will be universities, research centres and military factories," he pointed out.

Inevitably, *both countries' military-industrial complexes are being further integrated*. Israel's political establishment, for its part, is becoming an ever more disciplined and obedient satellite of Washington.

The Vanunu case has shed new light on Israel's nuclear plans and work.¹ Foreign sources estimate that it now has over 150 nuclear warheads developed jointly with the USA and South Africa.

A Supplier of World Reaction

Israeli arms exports jumped from \$50 million in 1972 to nearly \$1.1 billion in 1984. The 1987 figure was projected to reach \$1.3 billion, or about seven per cent of the total arms exports in the capitalist world. Israel is now the seventh largest arms exporter, its shipments abroad accounting for about one-quarter of its industrial sales. Over 600 travelling salesmen, many of them former Israeli army officers, are footloose abroad promoting such products.

Israel exports a variety of arms to fascist, dictatorial, and reactionary regimes in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The shipments are coordinated with the US administration and made under a bilateral strategic cooperation agreement. More specifically, whenever the Reagan administration finds itself unable, for home policy considerations, to deliver arms to fascist dictatorships or bands of rebels like the Contras, our ruling circles undertake this dirty job.

Sometime ago South Africa bought Israeli licenses for the manufacture of submachine-guns, rifles and guided-missile boats. Under a 1984 agreement, Israel is to deliver 36 Kfir planes to South Africa, and talks are under way on licensing the manufacture of these aircraft. The air force of the apartheid regime makes extensive use of Israeli-produced hardware in its acts of aggression against Angola.

Abetted by Washington, Israel has taken the lead in supplying weapons to Latin America. Among its clients are Chile, Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica; in the past it filled most of the fascist Somoza regime's needs for military hardware. There have been reports that Tel Aviv has armed a quarter of the total force of the Contras. The 'Irangate' helped reveal that some of the revenues from secret arms exports to Iran were being funnelled via Israel to the Contras.

What are the main objectives of this extensive arms trade?

First, to aid the Reagan administration's efforts to prop up and perpetuate fascist dictatorships and other reactionary regimes, or to establish such regimes and quell or undermine the national liberation drive worldwide.

Second, to further build up the economic and military muscle of the military-industrial complex.

Third, to improve the balance of payments and reduce its growing deficit.

Fourth, to gain political influence and backing in the fight against the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Arab nations like Syria which pursue an anti-imperialist course.

Fifth, to buttress other sub-imperialist centres, bulwarks of extreme reaction in the present world.

At the Working People's Expense

The growing militarisation of the Israeli economy is doing immense social harm, since vast resources are being squandered for military purposes, never to be recovered. The colossal military spending weighs ever more heavily on the Israeli citizens, primarily the working class and other working people.

Between 1973 and 1984 alone, the government spent close on \$60 billion for military ends. These official figures should be supplemented by arms spending listed in the budgets of various ministries. Furthermore, repayment of debts and interest on loans (for military purposes and chiefly from the US) has recently totalled \$10 billion a year. This means that *military spending gobbles up about two-thirds of the gross national product*, which is a global record.

Israel has found itself no longer able to repay its debts, even with extra borrowing. This is why US imperialism, at whose beck and call the Zionist leaders are, decided to provide Israel from 1984 with over \$3 billion worth of annual military and economic aid. But even that was not enough to keep the regime afloat. From mid-1985, the Reagan administration began, with Congressional approval, to provide its strategic ally with special emergency aid funds, which added up to \$1.5 billion in 1986. This 'magnanimity' is little help to our economy but rather a partial repayment of military and other favours Israel has been doing Washington in the Middle East and elsewhere. This is the crux of the matter. For each dollar we get from the USA in military loans we have to spend an extra two. *The more weapons Israel produces the greater its economic and political dependence.* Its current military budget amounts to over 70 per cent of the total national budget.

The annual balance of payments deficit has reached \$2 billion. Of the \$15 billion it spends on its imports Israel recovers only \$10 billion with its exports, while another \$3 billion are paid for with Washington's gifts and from other sources. The country's foreign debt is going up and up — from \$10 billion in 1975 to \$30 billion now. The rates of inflation are among the world's highest.

The militarisation of the Israeli economy and the stupendous military spending forced on the nation by its political leaders under pressure from the military-industrial complex are eating away working people's wages and incomes.

Unemployment is rampant. In 1983 it affected 4.5 per cent of the workforce, doubled within a year, and continued to mount in subsequent years. Construction, textiles, agriculture and the services are the hardest hit by lay-offs; roughly a third of recent immigrants are unemployed. The redundancies are on the rise because the tide has hit the military factories, too. The government and employers are using the scourge of unemployment in a bid to cut back real wages.

Poverty is a real blight. One out of every seven Israelis lives below the poverty line, and incomes are being increasingly polarised. Over the past few years university education fees have doubled. Drastic cuts in health care allocations are making the situation critical in hospitals and other health care facilities. In 1987, the food, public transportation, electricity and water subsidies plunged by over 60 per cent.

Increasingly factory and office workers and college students are not only becoming aware of the link between the escalating militarisation and the national socio-economic crisis but are taking an active stand against the arms race.

The Histadrut, the General Federation of Labour in Israel, could

become a crucial factor in this struggle, but its bosses betray the workers' interests by usually siding with the government and employers. Characteristically, too, the Federation, aside from its trade union functions, owns a variety of enterprises making up an important segment of the military-industrial complex and the state-monopoly and the banking sectors. About one-fourth of the industrial workforce is employed at Histadrut-owned factories. This partly explains the position of the trade union leadership.

The Communist Party is pressing for radical changes within the Federation through shifts in the balance of power and election of new leaders to make the Federation advance working class interests. It fights consistently against the aggressive expansionist policy of the Zionist ruling circles, calls for the abrogation of US-Israeli strategic cooperation agreement, demands an end to Israeli participation in the Star Wars project, calls for scrapping the nuclear bombs in Israel, and in general, for stopping the development of nuclear arms, and urges substantial reductions in military spending.

Israeli Communists and their allies in the democratic Front for Peace and Equality are actively struggling for a reasonable and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict, for a just solution to the Palestinian problem which has become still more acute since the end of last year, and against the onslaught of the government and the employers on the people's living standards.

The Communist Party of Israel is exerting every effort for establishing the broadest possible unity against the policy of the military-industrial complex, and for a just peace and social progress.

Israeli citizen Mordechai Vanunu, a former employee at an atomic plant in the Negev desert, told the London *Sunday Times* about Israeli nuclear projects. He was kidnapped in Europe by Mossad intelligence agents; he has been sentenced to 18 years in prison for passing state secrets.
