

# U.S. Charges Israel with Violating Rules on Missile Technology Sales

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According to Israeli television, the Israeli Space Agency has received a notice from the United States government notifying them that Israel is in violation of the Missile Technology Control Regime. Israel is being accused of transferring U.S. missile technology to third countries. Under the MTCR, any country given access to U.S. missile technology is prohibited from transferring that technology without the expressed permission of the United States. Israel now joins Iran, North Korea, Iraq and China as sanctioned under the MTCR protocol. The immediate results of the sanctions are not drastic. Israeli scientists and engineers will have their access to U.S. facilities limited to some degree. There are several joint projects that could potentially be affected under this agreement, but it is not clear how far the Clinton Administration will go in placing sanctions on Israel. The news stories do point to the fact that an Israeli is currently training with NASA in anticipation of a shuttle mission. This could be a pressure point. NASA's director, not coincidentally, is currently in Israel on a visit.

Israel has expressed astonishment at the charges. While the decision to list Israel under the MTCR at this moment is surprising, the fact that Israel is eligible for sanctions is not. Israel's aerospace industry has close and long-term relations with its American counterparts. Israel also has an extremely aggressive military sales program, which it uses to underwrite its own weapons development programs. Given collaboration with the United States, it is inevitable that Israel will be re-exporting U.S. technology in the course of its overseas sales. Since the Israelis are both aggressive and not necessarily fussy about whom they do business with, Israel could have been sanctioned at any point in recent years. Thus, Israeli astonishment, which is probably genuine, is not about being in violation of the MTCR as much as it is surprise that the United States would decide to cite them now.

There are two reasons for the sanctions, we suspect. The first is the rift that has developed between the United States and Israel over the peace process. Washington is furious with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and has been looking for pressure points that might increase Israeli pain and U.S. leverage. The low-profile the U.S. has placed on the listing might indicate that Washington wants to let the Israelis know just how bad things could become for Israel and how serious the United States is on the subject, without triggering a public outburst. However, given the fact that Netanyahu is counting on his ability to stir up a public outburst in the United States as a counter to any meaningful measures by Washington, the fact that Washington is minimizing publicity on this may simply convince him that Washington does not have the resolve to go through with it.

There is a second dimension to this. The United States is becoming genuinely concerned about the diffusion of sensitive technology into less- than-friendly hands. Israel is not alone in the re-export game by any means, but it has been aggressive and not particularly scrupulous in selecting its customers. There is little doubt that Israel has worked with China. There are long-standing rumors of Israeli-Iranian cooperation, motivated by their joint fear of Iraq. However, the trigger to all of this may have been the recent Indian nuclear tests, which focused attention on India's missile delivery systems. There have been strong indications that Israel has cooperated with India in developing this technology. Pakistan has vociferously raised this charge. Given the recent reevaluation of U.S. policy following the failure of U.S. intelligence to anticipate the Indian tests, we wonder whether the decision to sanction Israel was not the result of the intelligence review started after the tests. The review may have turned up proof of Israeli collusion, triggering the response. This latter is, of course, speculation.

This much is not speculation. Israel announced today that it was ordering three West German submarines capable of missile launching. The apparent purpose: to create a missile launch capability more secure than land based systems. The decision to create a strategic missile submarine force is not going to please the United States. Indeed, it will concern the U.S. far more than Netanyahu's Palestinian policy. The U.S. badly wants to get control of nuclear proliferation and is clearly going to view Israel's defense policy and its sales policy as a primary culprit. U.S.-Israeli relations are clearly in deep trouble. Undoubtedly, this is being noted with interest in Arab capitals.