

Israeli arms makers: Refugee crisis spurs demand for intel systems

Swiss parliament approved deal Monday to buy drones manufactured by Elbit, insists they will be 'unarmed.'

By [Gili Cohen](#) | Sep. 8, 2015 | 1:01 PM | 3

The refugee crisis in Europe is causing a renewed interest in Israeli intelligence and surveillance systems, according to one of the country's leading arms manufacturers. In addition, a few days ago it was reported that Hungary and Bulgaria are examining the possibility of building security fences along their borders, similar to the barrier Israel has built on its border with Egypt, in order to stem the tide of the refugee influx. Israel's Defense Ministry did not react to this report.

Israel is considered to be one of the world's major arms exporters, specializing among other things in manufacturing drones. According to an analysis by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, for the years 2010-2014 Israel was ranked in 10th place internationally in terms of volume of arms exports.

Israel's Defense Ministry claims that the cuts in defense budgets of armies worldwide, and the growing competition in the weapons-manufacturing market constitute a challenge to defense industries everywhere.

On Monday the upper house of the Swiss parliament approved a deal in which the country will purchase six Hermes 900 drones manufactured by Israel's Elbit Systems. The parliament emphasized that these are unarmed aerial vehicles that will be used for defending Switzerland's borders. The value of the deal, which was planned prior to the massive refugee crisis that now looms on the Continent, is estimated to be about 230 million euros.

In Israel, the transaction has been criticized by leftist circles, who claim that the Israel Defense Forces used the same drone in Operation Protective Edge in the Gaza Strip last summer, in which about 2,200 Palestinians were killed. The use during that war of the Hermes 900 – known in the Israel Air Force as Kokhav, or Star – marked its operational debut.

Swiss Defense Minister Ueli Maurer told a French news agency that Switzerland is purchasing the drones from a private company and not from the State of Israel per se, and reiterated that they will be used only for intelligence surveillance.

Two Israeli arms manufacturers – Elbit and the Israel Aerospace Industry – initially competed over the tender for the Swiss deal. The Hermes 900 and the IAI's Heron-1 underwent a series of trials in Switzerland, at the end of which the balance was tipped in favor of Elbit.