

Britain has sold £12billion of arms to tyrants... and regimes were on government's own blacklist, damning report reveals

By Ian Drury

Britain has sold more than £12billion of arms to countries on the Government's own blacklist for human rights abuses, a damning report reveals today.

Ministers approved the export of sniper rifles, machine guns, bullets, tear gas, military vehicles and other 'crowd control' equipment to **27 authoritarian regimes.**

Critics said the report laid bare the 'dirty secret' of the UK selling weapons and other hardware to brutal dictators who have crushed pro-democracy protests.



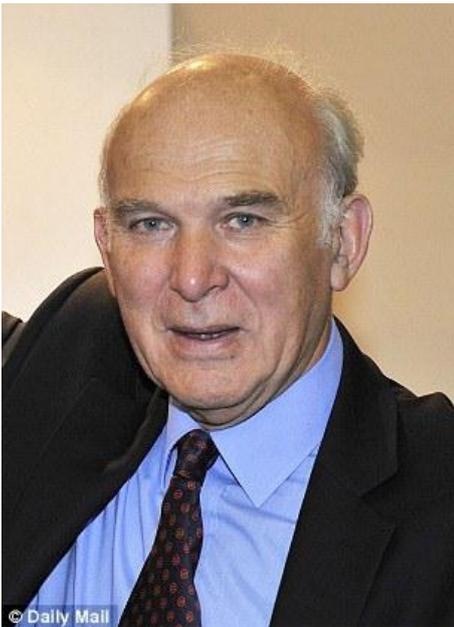
Britain has sold more than £12billion of arms to tyrants including Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (left) and Syria's Bashar al-Assad (right) even though they are on the government's own blacklist

The report from the Commons' Committees on Arms Export Controls revealed the Coalition has approved 3,074 export licences, worth £12.3billion, for military kit to nations the Foreign Office criticised for repression. MPs analysed Britain's sales following concerns that dictators in North Africa and the Middle East used UK-made hardware to smash uprisings during the Arab Spring.

Business Secretary Vince Cable approved 1,163 arms licences worth £1.4billion to China, including cryptography equipment which 'could be used for internal repression'.

Licences totalling £1.8billion to Saudi Arabia, £803million to Iran, £86million to Russia and £54million to Libya also are still valid.

Ministers rubber-stamped the sale of £143,000 of armoured vehicle parts and listening equipment to aid workers in Syria, where 100,000 people have been killed after tyrant Bashar al-Assad unleashed his troops on freedom campaigners.



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Israel also received £7.8billion of hardware – including one £7.7billion order of cryptography equipment – which has raised fears it could be used to crack down on Palestinians.

Military hardware was sold to despots including Iran's now-outgoing president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov.

MPs on the cross-party committee admitted the Coalition government had revoked 209 arms export licences. But they raised concerns about sales of arms in deals which are at odds with Britain's stance on upholding human rights. Sir John Stanley, the committees' Tory chairman, said 'very serious questions' need to be asked. He said the Government must 'apply significantly more cautious judgments' when considering arms export licences for authoritarian regimes.

'It seems that if things look okay when licences are put in front of them, even if it is for goods to an authoritarian regime with a pretty ghastly human rights record, then the Government is happy to approve it,' said Sir John. 'We take a different view. Regimes that look reasonably benign one moment can, the next moment, seem very much less than benign.'

'But once the bullets have left the country we have no control over what they are used for.' Sarah Waldron, of the Campaign Against Arms Trade, said: 'The promotion of arms sales sends the wrong message: one that condones human rights abuses, that legitimises authoritarian regimes and undermines those struggling for reforms.'