

By Nigel Green

The controversial issue of British companies supplying the Israeli armed forces during the Gaza conflict has been raised in Parliament.

More than 1,000 people have now been killed since the Israelis invaded the Palestinian enclave in December.

The possible use of British technology in the conflict has been discussed at a meeting of the Committee on Arms Export Controls.

Among the issues debated was the supply of heads-up display units, made by British companies and fitted into F16s and Apache helicopters, supplied by the US to Israel.

The Economic and Business Minister Ian Pearson told the committee no applications for heads of display units been granted since 2002 and there was no clear evidence that UK exports had been used in Gaza.

Mr Pearson told fellow MPs that, from April, light weapons would come under extra-territorial controls.

However, any further proposals would be based on discussions with the non-governmental organizations and the defence industry, although the Government would make a decision if consensus could not be achieved.

The Minister said the UK had refused a number of applications to Israel over the years, although he stressed that decisions were made on a case-by-case basis.

Questioned about substantial increases in exports to Israel and suggestions that this contributed to the conflict, the Minister disagreed cautioning against 'dramatising' the conflict.

Future licensing decisions would depend on how previous exports had been used, said Mr Pearson.

Liberal Democrat MP, Malcolm Bruce, said it was not clear what equipment had been used during the crisis and further investigation was needed.

Mr Pearson agreed to inform the committee about the information the department received on which exports from the UK had been involved in the conflict.

Conservative MP, Sir John Stanley, raised the issue of UK-licensed equipment being made

overseas.

However, Mr Pearson said attempting to control companies overseas was not legally-possible and UK laws could be easily bypassed.