



Briefing on the impact of UK arms sales to Israel – April 2024

This briefing is based on information provided by Bond's member INGOs and partner organisations.

- The UK continues to sell arms and components to Israel, despite the risk that such military equipment could be used in potential violations of international law.
- The UK risks being complicit in and facilitating serious violations of IHL if it fails to halt arms exports to Israel immediately.
- The UK has continued to supply arms to Israel despite the current level of risk of violations of international law since October 2023

The UK government must:

- Immediately suspend both extant licences for military equipment and technology and the issuing of new licences while the Israel continues to carry out widespread serious violations with impunity.
- Immediately disclose any legal advice regarding Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law.
- Adhere to its obligations under international law, respect the International Court of Justice ruling, and advocate for adherence to international law and accountability for all parties.
- Use every diplomatic and economic lever at its disposal to help secure an immediate and permanent ceasefire, to stop the death and destruction, allow enough aid in, and to ensure the safe release of hostages.
- Failure to do so risks the Government breaching its own laws and international obligations and being complicit in grave abuses.

Israel breaching IHL and the UK's complicity

All of Gaza's 2.3 million population need humanitarian assistance, however, a full and effective humanitarian response remains impossible due to the military offensive and because of restrictions imposed by Israel. This conflict has been characterised by serious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), committed by all parties to the armed conflict. If carried out intentionally or recklessly, attacks directed against civilian populations and civilian objects are war crimes.

The UN has stated that Israel's actions may amount to war crimes and that Israeli restrictions on aid may amount to starvation as a method of war; the International Court of Justice has stated that Israel's actions plausibly constitute genocide.

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The UK's arms exports

The UK most commonly issues two categories of arms licences - standard and open licences. The standard licence allows for shipments of specific items in specific quantities to an end-user and are typically valid for two years. Open licences have fewer restrictions and simply cover shipments of specific items to specific destinations, but the quantities or the name of the end-user do not need to be known.

UK's arms exports to Israel

Since 2015, the UK has licensed at least £489 million worth of military exports to Israel, through 1,250 standard licences. In the same time period, the UK issued 61 unlimited-value licences open licences to Israel.

The UK has approved exports of:

- Components for the F-35 stealth bomber aircraft - The UK provides approximately 15% of the components in the F-35 stealth bomber aircraft currently being used in Gaza, including the rear fuselage and active interceptor system, ejector seats, aircraft tyres, refuelling probe, laser targeting system, and the fan propulsion system. Durability testing for the F-35 is also undertaken in the UK. The F-35 needs almost daily servicing during combat missions and could not keep up attacks on civilians in Gaza without UK support.
- Components for Israeli armed and surveillance drones – Components for drones are made by UK linked companies and then assembled in Israeli factories. The same drones were used in Nagorno Karabakh by Azerbaijan and are ever present above Gaza and the West Bank both for spying missions and in attacks on civilians.
- Military Intelligence and technology - The UK provides intelligence from overflights of Gaza to enable military operations, and allows the US to use UK air bases in Cyprus to do the same which facilitates Israeli attacks in Gaza. Components produced in the UK are built into surveillance and armed drones which are used permanently over Gaza.

Whilst the UK's exports represent a small proportion of Israel's overall military imports, it is still duty bound under its legal obligations, and if there is a clear risk that arms and military equipment transferred to Israel might be used to facilitate or commit serious violations of international law, including attacks that may amount to war crimes, they must be stopped and revoked.

Previous suspensions

The UK has previously suspended and revoked licences due to end use violations and breaking of IHL.

- In 2014, the UK Government reviewed and suspended twelve export licences to Israel following the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hamas and other armed groups in Gaza.
- In 2009, licences for naval guns were revoked due to their use against civilians in Gaza in contravention of IHL.
- A significant number of licences were also suspended or revoked in the wake of the Arab Spring due to concerns of internal repression, and in 2019 the UK Government was forced to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia following a ruling from the Court of Appeal that due to the use of arms by Saudi Arabia in violations of IHL in Yemen.

Under UK national and international obligations, when an arms purchaser repeatedly refuses to abide by end use conditions, and when UK supplied arms are used in serious violations of IHL as is the case with Israel, the UK must end the supply of arms to that recipient.

Parliamentary scrutiny

Parliamentary scrutiny of the UK's arms exports regime is crucial. The now-disbanded Committees on Arms Export Controls (CAEC) previously consisted of four select committee chairs - Trade, Defence, International Development and Foreign Affairs – and was responsible for scrutinising UK arms exports policy related to their respective government departments. The CAEC should be re-convened immediately.

Since January 2024, the Business and Trade Committee has taken an overall lead of parliamentary scrutiny for UK arms exports with other committees able to examine strategic exports as part of other work. In the short term, it is crucial that the Business and Trade Committee scrutinise the role of UK manufactured weapons used in Gaza as a matter of urgency.

Spokespeople on arms control

Roy Isbister, Team Leader of the Arms Unit at [Saferworld](#)

Roy has over 20 years experience in responsible arms transfer control strategies nationally, regionally and internationally. He regularly gives evidence to Parliamentary Committees and contributes to international media on arms control issues.

Saferworld is an independent, not-for-profit international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives in countries and territories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

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Rochard Stanforth, Senior Policy Advisor, [Oxfam](#)

Oxfam has a long history of working on the impact of arms on civilians in humanitarian crises, most recently having campaigned to stop the export of UK arms to Saudi Arabia for use in the conflict in Yemen. Oxfam has been working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel since the 1950s, and still have staff in Gaza today.

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Notes

- This briefing has been informed by briefings from Bond member organisation, Oxfam GB and briefings from Amnesty International UK.
- Bond unites and supports a diverse network of over 350 civil society organisations from across the UK, and allies to help eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice.
- Many of Bond's member organisations are actively working in or have recently worked in some form in Gaza providing humanitarian assistance to civilians.
- For further information or interviews, please get in touch with Jess Salter at jsalter@bond.org.uk or call 07493200979.

