

UK Arms Industry and Israel

Since 2015, the UK government has licensed at least £474 million worth of military exports to Israel since 2015 across 965 limited-value “standard” licenses,¹ including UK-built parts for missiles, tanks, aircraft, submarines, targeting equipment, radars, small arms and ammunition.

The total value of UK arms exports to Israel in that period is certain to be in excess of £474 million, as a result of 58 unlimited-value “open” licenses having also been approved. These open licenses, of opaque and open-ended value, permit the transfer of unlimited quantities of particular military goods.

Since 2002, the UK government has also established the ability, to avoid application of its strategic export licensing criteria to Israel through the use of ‘incorporation licenses’ wherein UK components are sent to third-country destinations, such as the US, for incorporation into military goods for onward export to Israel.²

UK Aerospace Exports to Israel

The most significant contribution of the UK to Israel’s military arsenal is through its aerospace industry. UK industry produces approximately 15% of the components that are used in the F-35 stealth combat aircraft, which has been used in the bombardment of Gaza since 7th October 2023. In lieu of disclosure of the relevant ‘open license’ values, the Campaign Against Arms Trade has calculated an estimation of the contract values for components of the F-35 to be around £336m since 2016.

The Department of Business and Trade has clarified that there are 79 UK companies contributing to the production of the F-35.³ Many of these companies specialise in production of individual parts: BAE Systems produces the rear fuselage; Cobham Mission Systems, the refuelling probe; Martin-Baker, the ejector seat; Leonardo, the laser targeting system; and Dunlop Aircraft Tyres, which makes the tyres.⁴ The weapons release cables and laser targeting systems for F-35s are produced in Brighton and Edinburgh by American and Italian firms L3Harris and Leonardo, respectively.⁵

F-16s, meanwhile, comprise the majority of Israel’s aircraft fleet and serve as the ‘workhorse of the Gaza bombing campaign’.⁶ UK-made components for F-16s, produced by companies including BAE Systems and GKN Aerospace, have ‘almost certainly’ been used in prior bombing campaigns in Gaza, the government has admitted.⁷

Additional Exports

In addition to aircraft components, a broad range of other weapons and technologies produced by UK industry may be being used in both aerial and ground operations against Gaza. UK companies are involved in production of the MLRS M270 rocket launcher, and Raytheon’s Glenrothes premises are used to make Paveway IV missiles, which are assembled in the USA after production. Whilst there are no export licenses for the Paveway IV from Britain to Israel, Raytheon does supply Paveway II missiles to Israel from the USA. Since the supply chain is opaque, it is possible that Paveway IV missiles produced in the UK are supplied to Israel.

¹ Campaign Against Arms Trade (2023). [UK Export License Data \(Israel\)](#)

² Select Committee on Defence. (20th May 2002). [‘Second Joint Report: Defence \(Collaborative Defence Manufacturing\)](#), House of Commons.

³ Campaign Against Arms Trade. (20th December 2023) [Full list of UK companies contributing to the production of the F-35.](#)

⁴ Perlo-Freeman, S., et al. (23rd November 2023). [‘The UK Companies Arming – and the People Resisting – the Occupation of Palestine’](#), DeclassifiedUK.

⁵ Campaign Against Arms Trade. (December 2023) [Gaza and UK Arms Sales to Israel – Fact Sheet.](#)

⁶ Kusovac, Z. (3rd November 2023). [‘Analysis: Israel’s Gaza bombing campaign is proving costly, for Israel’](#), Al Jazeera.

⁷ Miliband, D. (21st April 2009). [‘Israel \(UK Strategic Export Controls\)’](#), Hansard.

Instro Precision, a Kent-based subsidiary of Israel's Elbit Systems, exports targeting equipment for troops and vehicles likely to be used in Israel's ground operations in Gaza.⁸ Elbit Systems produces 85% of the drones and land-based equipment used by the Israeli army.⁹ The single-largest license in value approved in recent years is for £182m in military radar technologies,¹⁰ the nature and producer of which remain undisclosed.

Facilitating Arms Transfers & Military Operations

Since October 2023, it has been reported that RAF Akrotiri, the British airbase on Cyprus, may have been used to facilitate the transfers of weapons to Israel, with 33 military transport flights reportedly having taken place across October and November 2023.¹¹ The government denies that Royal Air Force (RAF) planes have transported any 'lethal cargo' to Israel. The same assurances have not been made as regards the nature of US Air Force transportation via Cyprus, despite a parliamentary question issued to the Secretary of State for Defence on this matter in December 2023.¹² Information has also not been released about the 'defensive material' which the government claims comprise the transfers made by the RAF through Akrotiri.¹³

Details have similarly been withheld as regards the nine Israeli Air Force operated planes that have taken off and landed from British territory since October.¹⁴ The opacity of information published, regarding the activity of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) generally and the RAF specifically, mean that concrete conclusions cannot be reached regarding the surveillance flights conducted by UK aircraft over Israel and Gaza, despite MoD assurances that these flights are solely for the purpose of hostage rescue.¹⁵

UK Institutions Investing in Arms Companies

In February 2024, a freedom of information request was issued into Trinity College Cambridge's investment interests. It emerged that the university has invested millions in Caterpillar, Rolls Royce, Toyota, General Electric, Barclays Bank, all of which conduct business with the Israeli military. The university has also invested £61,735 in Elbit Systems and £650,000 in L3 Harris Technologies, both of which produce components used directly in arms and weapons systems.¹⁶ More widely, UK universities have accepted almost £100 million from defence companies arming Israel.¹⁷ ICJP issued a follow up letter to Trinity in May 2024. Having not received a response to their previous two letters, ICJP issued a formal complaint to the Charity Commission regarding Trinity's investments. Six days later, Trinity reportedly decided to divest from all arms companies.¹⁸

Following the success of the ICJP submission against Trinity College, ICJP submitted a further series of notices of potential risk of criminal complicity to a wider list of eighty-two universities.¹⁹ The letters inform universities that profiting off investments made in companies supplying weapons to a military that uses them in the commission of war crimes may be a criminal offence. It also informs universities that university officers' risk prosecution in the United Kingdom or elsewhere for doing so.

⁸ Campaign Against Arms Trade. (December 2023). [Gaza and UK Arms Sales to Israel – Fact Sheet](#).

⁹ Database of Israeli Military and Security Export. [Elbit Systems General Information](#).

¹⁰ Campaign Against Arms Trade. (2023). [UK Export License Data \(Israel\)](#).

¹¹ Action on Armed Violence, (28th November 2023) '[UK Government suppresses MP inquiries about Cyprus base's role in Gaza conflict](#)'.

¹² Heapey, J. (11th December 2023) [RAF Akrotiri. Question for Ministry of Defence. Parliamentary Question](#) UIN54345.

¹³ Wilks, A. (15th January 2024). '[UK's alleged use of Cyprus bases to arm Israel and hit Yemen draw protests](#)', Al Jazeera.

¹⁴ Kennard, M. (8th February 2024) '[UK admits nine Israeli military planes have visited Britain since Gaza bombing began](#)', Declassified UK.

¹⁵ Ministry of Defence. (2nd December 2023). '[UK military activity in the Eastern Mediterranean](#)'.

¹⁶ Mulla, I. (21st February 2024) [Cambridge University investing millions in companies fuelling Israel's War on Gaza](#). Middle East Eye.

¹⁷ Stockwell, B and Corderoy, J. (19th December 2023) [UK universities take millions from defence companies arming Israel](#). Open Democracy.

¹⁸ Arwen Godingen. (12th May 2024) [Trinity reportedly votes to divest from arms companies](#). Varsity.

¹⁹ MEE Staff. (1st May 2024) [War on Gaza: 82 UK universities warned of criminal liability over Israeli arms ties](#). Middle East Eye.