

THE UK-ISRAEL ARMS TRADE



The UK is complicit in Israel's daily violations of human rights through our arms trade. Despite the illegality of Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and systematic violation of Palestinian human rights, the UK is a major arms exporter to Israel and purchaser of Israeli weapons and weapon technology. Beyond government responsibility, a range of private corporations are also complicit in the arms trade and profit from Israel's oppression of Palestinians, including the UK high street bank HSBC.

Israel's military occupation of Palestinians

Israel uses significant military force to maintain its oppression of Palestinians. The Israeli military and police target Palestinian civilians daily with lethal violence, which includes the use of tear gas grenades, rubber-coated and sponge-tipped bullets and live ammunition. B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights monitoring organisation, reports 3,117 Palestinian deaths caused by Israeli forces since 2009. Palestinians are also subjected to frequent arrest raids and punitive house demolitions, all in the name of security. Israel maintains a deadly military blockade on the Gaza Strip, a form of collective punishment prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention, and has conducted three large-scale military offensives against civilians in Gaza in 10 years. The last assault, in the summer of 2014, killed 2,205 Palestinians including 547 children. This violence and destruction is made possible by Israel's trade in arms with countries such as the UK.

UK arms sales to Israel

During Israel's devastating assault on Gaza in 2014, Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister who had previously called for a full arms embargo in 2009, reported that the UK government would take significant action against the sale of arms to Israel. However, "business as usual" continued and the UK has exported more than £220m of weapons and weapon technology to Israel since the end of the 2014 assault. Additionally, the UK has approved applications for military licences from companies that provided components for the Hermes drone, a deadly aerial weapon used during Israel's attacks on Gaza and described as the backbone of targeting and reconnaissance missions by the Israeli air force.



Photo: Palestine Solidarity Project

Legal framework for arms exports

States providing military aid or licenses for arms export to Israel often do so in violation of their own legal obligations. In the UK, arms exports licensing decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. According to the official criteria adopted in 2000, the government must consider various criteria before granting arms licenses, including the buyer country's respect for international law. If properly implemented, the government's own guidelines should enable it to impose an arms embargo against Israel. In practice, however, these guidelines are interpreted weakly even in times of heightened violence. In 2014, Britain approved fresh arms deals worth £4m within weeks of the Israeli assault on Gaza, effectively conducting "business as usual" with Israel despite the risk of UK-made weaponry being used against Palestinian civilians.

The UK is furthermore legally bound by the international Arms Trade Treaty to assess whether there is an overriding risk that arms exported to Israel will be used for or contribute to human rights abuses.

UK arms purchases from Israel

The arms trade with Israel is bilateral and the UK is a highly valued customer of Israel's weapons and weapon technology industry. Israel uses the Occupied Territories as a testing ground for researching and developing its weaponry, which it markets around the world as "combat-proven" and "field-tested". By buying from Israeli companies such as Elbit Aerospace Industries and Rafael, the UK is complicit in Israel's abuse of Palestinian human rights.

Global call for an arms embargo

In 2011, Palestinian civil society called for an end to the bilateral trade with Israel in light of its systematic human rights violations and disregard for international law. This call has since been supported by numerous human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, as well as prominent human rights defenders, notably Archbishop Desmond Tutu alongside three other Nobel Peace Laureates.



Photo: Michael Loadenthal

The chain of complicity and corporate responsibility

The chain of complicity in the UK-Israel arms trade is complex and involves various public and private actors, including UK corporations. More than 100 companies manufacturing and selling military equipment to Israel have offices and factories in the UK: BAE Systems, Caterpillar, Boeing, Elbit Systems and Lockheed Martin are just some of them. Similarly, UK financial institutions and banks benefit from Israel’s oppression of Palestinians by investing in these companies and providing them with a

wide range of financial services. Barclays and HSBC, for example, both hold shares in BAE Systems, Boeing, Rolls Royce and Babcock, which are significantly involved in arming Israel.

In 2013, the UK published a National Action Plan for Businesses and Human Rights, based on United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights, establishing the government’s intention to “support, motivate and incentivise UK businesses to meet their responsibility to respect human rights throughout their operations both at home and abroad”. This is in line with the UN’s call for corporations to avoid causing or contributing to human rights violations directly through their business activities, or when caused by their suppliers or partners. However, in practice, the UK government has done little to advance this goal.

What you can do

PSC is working with a range of partner organisations to Stop Arming Israel. The campaign is twofold: first, it asks the UK government to end its bilateral arms trade with Israel by implementing a two-way embargo. Second, the campaign aims to tackle corporate complicity by calling on HSBC to cut ties with companies trading weapons or weapon technology with Israel. We need to increase the pressure on HSBC to sever its ties with companies that arm Israel’s militarised repression of the Palestinian people.

Get involved in the Stop Arming Israel campaign by:

- Calling on HSBC to stop profiting from Israel’s oppression of Palestinians. Email the CEO of HSBC by taking the e-action: palestinecampaign.org/lobby/HSBC-StopArmingIsrael
- Find out more, download and print some useful campaign material – including the Stop Arming Israel leaflet, HSBC action cards, and a full report on the UK-Israel arms trade from: palestinecampaign.org/campaigns/stop-arming-israel
- Contact us for more information: campaigns@palestinecampaign.org

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