

UK Sells \$445 Million of Arms to Israel, Including Sniper Rifles

Value of sales increase tenfold after 2014 Gaza war amid warnings UK weapons, including gear for snipers, could be used to kill Palestinians

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Britain has approved the sale of arms to Israel worth \$445m since the 2014 Gaza war, including components for drones, combat aircraft and helicopters along with spare parts for sniper rifles, according to figures seen by Middle East Eye.

The government data will raise fresh concerns that British-made weapons are being used by the Israeli military in the Occupied Territories, amid fears that components in sniper rifles used to kill scores of Palestinian civilians in recent weeks could have been made in the UK.

Arms export licences to Israel soared to £216m, or \$300m at current exchange rates, last year from £20m in the wake of the Gaza war, new Department for International Trade figures show.

They include a major £183m licence covering “technology for military radars”, but ministers have also approved the sale for export of grenades, bombs, missiles, armoured vehicles, assault rifles, small arms ammunition, sniper rifles and components for sniper rifles.

The value of arms approvals to Israel more than doubled last year after £84m in sales in 2016, prompting campaigners to warn that there is “little doubt” that UK-made weapons have been used in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The Campaign Against the Arms Trade, or CAAT, which compiled the figures, expressed concern that UK-made radar technology could be used by Israeli jets and helicopters over the Occupied Territories.

However, it is the scale of small arms sales that have prompted fears UK-made sniper rifle components and targeting scopes may have been used by the Israeli military on the Gaza border.

British weaponry, Israeli oppression

Labour MP **Richard Burden**, the chairman of the British-Palestine group in Parliament, told MEE that given the risk of weapons being used for “internal repression” in Gaza and the West Bank he was “alarmed by the scale of UK arms exports to Israel in recent years”.

He added that he will be “pressing” ministers to launch an investigation into whether UK arms have been used in “the current Israeli military operations on the Gaza border”.

Palestinian officials say at least 40 people have been killed by Israeli forces since the start of a six-week protest at the Israeli occupation, dubbed the Great March of Return, earlier this month.

The shootings prompted international outcry after it [emerged](#) Israeli snipers who shot Palestinians had positioned themselves alongside the Gaza security fence, with orders allowing them to shoot unarmed Palestinians who came within 100 yards.

The violence prompted Labour leader **Jeremy Corbyn** to call for a review of arms sales to Israel in a message condemning its “illegal and inhumane” killing and wounding of “yet more unarmed Palestinian protesters”.

Corbyn also called for the UK to support calls for a [“independent and transparent”](#) UN inquiry into the shootings and called for a review of the sale of UK-made arms that “could be used in violation of international law”.

Government ministers, as well as senior Labour figures including the shadow foreign secretary, **Emily Thornberry**, have argued that Israel has a [right to defend itself](#) from military assault and “terrorist attacks”.

The Israeli military says it only fires in self-defence and that its forces on the Gaza border were “identifying attempts to carry out terror attacks under the camouflage of riots”, but campaign groups have labelled the shootings a “massacre”.

The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment.

Andrew Smith, a spokesman for CAAT, told MEE:

“There is little doubt that UK equipment has been used against the people of Gaza time and again, but that hasn’t stopped successive governments from licensing even more arms to the Israeli military.

“The appalling scenes we have seen over recent weeks are yet another stark reminder of the repression and abuse that Palestinians are living under every day. The response to protests hasn’t just been heavy-handed, it has been a massacre.

“By continuing to arm Israeli forces the UK isn’t just making itself complicit in future attacks, it is sending a message of support for the collective punishment that has been inflicted.

“The situation is desperate, and the UK should be working for a peaceful and just solution, not pushing arms sales which can be used in abuses for years to come.”

Israel has historically [breached assurances](#) given to ministers that UK-made arms would not be used in the Occupied Territories.

Critics of the British arms trade say that the sale of weapons to Israel also stands in stark contrast to Foreign Office warnings in its most recent [annual human rights report](#) that Israel’s occupation policies continue to violate the “human rights of Palestinians”.

That report cited “punitive demolitions” of homes belonging to the families of Palestinians suspected of perpetrating attacks on Israelis.

Chris Doyle, the director of the Council for Arab-British Understanding, or CAABU, told MEE

it was an “outrage that Britain is still selling such weaponry to a state that treats human life and international law with such contempt”.

Campaigners have also expressed alarm that some of the weaponry approved for export, such as military radar, components for fast jets and helicopter parts, is of the sort previously used by Israeli forces in Gaza and the West Bank, including during the 2014 Gaza war – dubbed “Operation Protective Edge” by Israel – and during the 2009 assault.

After the 2009 conflict – “Operation Cast Lead” – the influential Commons committee on arms exports reported that British arms exports “almost certainly” were used in the attack, in direct contravention of the UK’s policy that arms exports should not be used in the Occupied Territories.

British restrictions lifted

The then foreign secretary, **David Miliband**, [said](#) Israeli equipment used in the attack on Gaza “almost certainly” contained British-supplied components, including cockpit displays in US-made F-16 combat aircraft, and components for the fire control and radar systems, navigation equipment and engine assemblies for US-made Apache attack helicopters.

There were renewed calls for a halt to arms sales during the Gaza conflict in 2014, which resulted in the deaths of more than 2,200 Palestinian and 76 Israelis. The then-prime minister, **David Cameron**, said all export licences would be reviewed.

However, all restrictions on arms sales to Israel were [dropped in 2015](#) following a 12-month review, in which the government admitted UK-made weapons may have been used in the 2014 bombardment of Gaza.

Since then, MEE understands the government has made no assessment of whether UK weapons have been used in the Occupied Territories, and arms licences have soared.

A spokesman for the Department for International Trade said the

UK “takes its export control responsibilities very seriously and operates one of the most robust export control regimes in the world”.

It added:

“We rigorously examine every application on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, with risks around human rights abuses being a key part of that process.

“We will not grant a licence if doing so would be inconsistent with these criteria and will suspend or revoke licences when the level of risk changes.”

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