

Colluding in War Crimes: Britain's Unreported Military Alliance with Israel

Mainstream Media Blackout

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The rapidly declining living conditions in the Gaza Strip and occupied territories has endangered the most basic of internationally recognised of human rights, as children continue to be collateral damage in what can be boiled down to a political standoff. The difference to almost all modern countries is that Israel uses extreme force to break the deadlock.

It is now sadly a fact that more [children than Palestinian fighters](#) are being killed in the offensive on Gaza by the state of Israel. This in itself should be shocking until you see the numbers. 28 per cent killed are five years and under, 92 per cent are sixteen and under with 8 per cent aged 17 and 18 - but still classed as minors. More babies aged under 24 months die than those aged over 16 years.

Then there are the incarcerations. The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories records them. It shows that in the ten years from 2008 to 2018 - a [staggering 2,370 children have been sent to Israeli prisons](#). At the end of January 2019, 209 Palestinian children were held in Israeli prisons as security detainees and prisoners.

In January this year, the General Federation of Palestinian Trade Unions (PGFTU) [warned](#) that the poverty rate in the Gaza Strip has exceeded 80 per cent for the wider population. The numbers for mental health problems, access to health care or the basics such as access to clean water, electricity and sanitation are dire.

It shames Britain, that a country, ranked by the [World Justice Project](#) as the 8th most law-abiding country in the world actively supports a regime with weapons of death and destruction, described by organisations such as War on Want and the United Nations as an [apartheid](#) state. Others, including Human Rights Watch, accuse [Israel of war crimes](#) against defenceless Palestinians.

To enable that support, a media blackout is required in Britain. Here, Mark Curtis unravels the grizzly truth of Britain's involvement in this ghastly and illegal aggression and what is really going on behind the scenes.

Image on the right: International Trade Secretary Liam Fox meets with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. (Source: gov.uk)

By [Mark Curtis](#):



Britain's international trade secretary, Liam Fox, recently [visited](#) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, pledging to increase trade and investment between the two countries, which already stands at a record \$9bn.

While more than 230 Palestinians have been killed and thousands more injured by Israeli forces since March, London's ties with Tel Aviv are growing ever stronger.

Yet, I cannot find a single article in the British "mainstream" media noting the depth of supportive UK policies towards Israel. This media blackout is allowing Britain to continue backing Israeli aggression in the occupied territories with impunity.

Arms as usual

In the two years 2016 and 2017, when Theresa May has been prime minister, the UK sold £402m worth of [military goods](#) to Israel, including components for combat aircraft, tanks, drones and military communications. As Prince William visited Israel in late June, the UK approved export licences for 34 types of [military-related equipment](#). These arms exports have been authorised while Palestinians risk their lives in the Great March of Return demonstrations on the perimeter fence between Gaza and Israel. Some [33 children](#) were among those killed, alongside more than [24,000 Palestinians injured](#). Dozens of people have had limbs amputated, including 15 children, while the [UN reports](#) that 1,200 patients will require long-term limb reconstruction.

But many services are unavailable in Gaza as the healthcare system grapples with the massive influx of casualties. By the end of October, only 74 of 335 [exit-permit](#) applications had been approved by Israeli authorities for injured Palestinians needing attention outside of Gaza.

Documents revealed by Edward Snowden in 2014 [showed](#) that the US National Security Agency was providing to its Israeli counterpart, the Israeli SIGINT National Unit (ISNU, also known as Unit 8200) data used to monitor and target Palestinians.

A key partner of the NSA and ISNU was shown to be Britain's spy centre, GCHQ, which was feeding the Israelis selected communications data it collected. In 2009, during Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza that left nearly 1,400 people dead, included 344 children, this involved [sharing information](#) on Palestinians.

A 'strong partnership'

Is the UK doing this now? Last year, Robert Hannigan, the outgoing director of GCHQ, [said](#) that his organisation had a “strong partnership with our Israeli counterparts in signals intelligence” and that “we are building on an excellent cyber relationship with a range of Israeli bodies”.

Earlier this year, Hannigan became chair of BlueVoyant Europe, a global cybersecurity firm whose operations are [managed by](#), among others, a former deputy commander of Unit 8200, and a former division head in the Israeli security agency Shin Bet. Another key player in the firm is former British minister [Lord Mandelson](#), who chairs BlueVoyant’s European Advisory Group.

Cybersecurity has become a key area of UK-Israeli cooperation. A [recent report](#) by the British Israeli lobby group, Bicom, notes that “government-to-government cooperation between the UK and Israel in cybersecurity is strong and has been described by a senior UK official as a ‘first-order partnership’”.

It added that “there are close working relationships between the countries’ national cybersecurity agencies and acknowledged cross-fertilisation in the development of their national security strategies”.

Indeed, the report notes that “it is perhaps no coincidence” that the former UK ambassador to Israel, Matthew Gould, returned from his posting in Tel Aviv in 2015 to become director of cybersecurity at the UK Cabinet Office.

In striking evidence of Britain’s reliance on Israel’s cybersecurity sector is the report’s claim that since major British banks are clients of many Israeli cyber companies, “the vast majority of digital transactions and credit card e-commerce in the UK is essentially protected by Israeli technologies”.

Deepening military relations

As I documented in an [article](#) for Middle East Eye in June, the UK’s military relationship with Israel is extensive, covering areas such as naval cooperation and the provision of components for Israeli nuclear-armed submarines. But the lack of journalistic investigations means that few details have emerged on many programmes.

In September, the government [revealed](#) that it was providing military training to Israel. This followed news in 2016 that British military pilots were due to be [trained](#) by a company owned by Israeli arms firm Elbit Systems.

Training is longstanding: in 2011, it was [revealed](#) that British soldiers were being trained in Israel in the use of drones that had been “field-tested on Palestinians” during the 2009 war in Gaza.

The contracts keep coming. Earlier this year, the UK’s Ministry of Defence agreed to a [contract](#) worth up to \$52m to purchase a battlefield management application from Elbit Systems UK, while Israel’s armour specialist, Plasan, was [selected](#) by the UK Ministry of Defence to design and produce armour protection for Britain’s new Type 26 frigates being built by BAE Systems in Glasgow.

At the Conservative Party conference in October, senior government figures queued up at

an event hosted by Conservative Friends of Israel to defend Israeli actions in the occupied territories. Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson [stated](#): “In terms of defence, Britain and Israel are working increasingly closely together. There’s a real bond.”

Facilitating Israeli violence

Similarly, Liam Fox [told](#) Netanyahu last week:

“I am looking forward to an enhanced and even more ambitious trade and investment relationship with Israel as we work closer together going forward into the future.”

Netanyahu replied:

“Britain is in fact our largest trade partner in Europe ... we value the friendship, we value the prospects for the future.”

Fox and Williamson are continuing the strategy of their boss, Theresa May, who has [said](#) of Israel:

“I want to build the strongest and deepest possible relationship between our two countries.”

Yet, the reality of what this means in practice – especially in terms of British military and intelligence support for Israel, and how this facilitates Israeli aggression – is simply not being reported in the British media. The longer that continues, the easier it will be for Israel to continue to act with impunity for its crimes.

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