

Stop Arming Israel

“The Israeli airstrikes today, and the catastrophic human toll that they caused, challenge those countries that have been and remain complicit, either directly or indirectly, in Israel’s violations of international law. That complicity includes those countries knowingly providing the military equipment including warplanes and missiles used in these illegal attacks.”
Richard Falk, the UN special rapporteur for human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories speaking on 27 December 2008

Assault on Gaza

The Israeli assault on the people of Gaza, which started on 27 December 2008 and lasted over three weeks, shocked the world in its brutality and the scale of devastation it caused. The attack killed over 1,400 people, a third of whom were women and children, and left thousands more injured and homeless.

During the attack vital infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and UN buildings were deliberately bombed and weapons such as white phosphorous and cluster bombs were used against civilians. According to the UN, Israel destroyed 4,247 homes in Gaza during this assault. Even ambulances were targeted by the Israeli army and health workers killed. The International Committee of the Red Cross took the unusual step of accusing Israel of breaching the Geneva Conventions by preventing ambulances from rescuing civilians wounded by Israeli bombing.

The attack was conducted by a powerful Israeli army using disproportionate and indiscriminate force against civilian populations in clear breach of humanitarian law. The international community has a duty to prevent such war crimes. Yet despite the fact that Israel has flouted more UN resolutions and for a longer period than any other country, Western governments, including the UK government, continue to supply Israel with weapons and military equipment.

Occupation of Palestinian territory

Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territory provides a central focus of tension in Middle East politics. Since the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000 Israel has intensified its military action against Palestinians living under the occupation, leading to a human rights and humanitarian crisis. As a result of the occupation, 70% Palestinians are now living in acute poverty and over half are dependent on food aid.



A Palestinian woman surveys her destroyed house after an Israeli air strike in Jabalya on 2 January 2009.

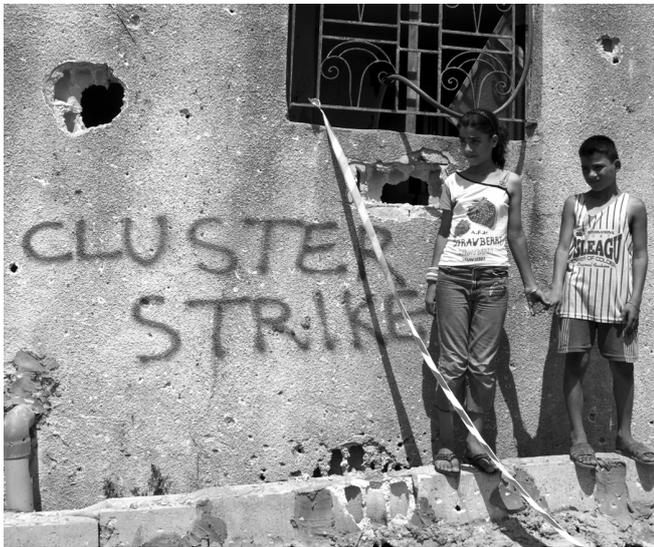
The Israeli military is directly involved in many human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law including the systematic destruction of Palestinian homes, olive groves and water systems, enforcing closures and restrictions on movement and obstructing humanitarian aid.

The military is also an essential component of Israel’s occupation and the permanent annexation of large sections of the West Bank and East Jerusalem through ever expanding Israeli settlements. The settlements are protected by a matrix of military control including the Separation Wall. The Wall, which has been ruled illegal by the International Court of Justice, rips through Palestinian villages, roads and agricultural land and cuts off access to vital water supplies.

Israel’s military has also been active against other countries in the region. In 2006 the Israeli army launched an attack on Lebanon, killing more than 1,000 Lebanese civilians. During this attack essential infrastructure was destroyed and whole neighbourhoods flattened in Beirut. According to Amnesty International, the destruction of Lebanese infrastructure, including water treatment plants, supermarkets and strategically unimportant bridges, was a deliberate strategy on the part of the Israeli army.

Arms to Israel

Despite these continued human rights abuses, the UK government licenses millions of pounds’ worth of military equipment to Israel every year including components for tanks and combat aircraft. In recent years the UK has licensed arms exports to Israel worth between £10 million and £25 million a year.



Lebanese children outside their house, marked with the words 'cluster strike' to alert locals to the presence of unexploded ordnance. Israel deployed over one million cluster bombs during its 2006 attack on Lebanon. Sean Sutton/MAG

However, figures available for the first nine months of 2008 show that military equipment worth over £27 million had been approved for export to Israel.

Export licences approved from Britain to Israel in 2008 include components for: combat aircraft, electronic warfare equipment, helmet mounted display equipment, military aero-engines, naval radars, surface-to-air missiles, equipment for the use of weapon sights and military communication. A significant number of UK components are used for missile triggering systems for Apaches and Head-Up Displays for F-16s. Israel has used F-16 fighter aircraft and Apache combat helicopters to bomb Lebanese and Palestinian towns and villages.

Since October 2000 the UK government has used the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria to judge whether arms export licences should be granted. These set out a series of considerations, including whether the country of destination is in breach of international law or is involved in armed conflicts and respects human rights. On each of these counts Israel is seriously wanting, yet the number of arms licence applications which have been denied has decreased (from 84 in 2002 to 17 in 2007) as the number of deaths in Palestinian territory continue to increase. The British government has admitted that it cannot accept Israeli assurances that military equipment sold from Britain is not being used in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and yet it continues to license these sales.

In evidence to the parliamentary Quadripartite Committee in 2006, Foreign Office minister Kim Howells reaffirmed that it was government policy not to allow export of equipment or components which could be "deployed aggressively" in Palestinian territory, but then acknowledged that "almost any piece of equipment, I suppose, could be used

aggressively". Given that aircraft and tanks for which UK companies make components are regularly used aggressively against Palestinians, the government's practice appears to make its own export standards meaningless.

By selling arms to Israel the UK is giving direct material support for Israel's aggression and sending a clear message of approval for its actions. In February 2009, Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq launched legal proceedings with Public Interest Lawyers in the UK for a judicial review of the UK government's policy of licensing arms sales to Israel.

"The Apache is not just equipment. For Palestinians it's a symbol of indiscriminate military violence. From a young age, every Palestinian child learns to distinguish the Apache's sound and associate it with assassinations, destruction and blood in the street." Shawan Jabarin, director of the Palestinian human rights group al-Haq

The Israeli arms industry

Israel has its own arms industry, which is well integrated into the global arms trade, so an effective and credible arms embargo needs to operate in both directions. Israeli companies such as Israel Aircraft Industries, Israel Military Industries, Rafael and Elbit Systems built their business selling arms to regimes which other countries refused to supply, such as South Africa during the apartheid era and Burma today. Yet Europe is now also an important market for Israeli companies, and the UK is no exception. Military exports are a key part of Israel's economy and Israel Aircraft Industries is the country's biggest private employer.

Stop Arming Israel

Rather than speaking out against the occupation of Palestine, the international community is actively supporting the continued subjugation of the Palestinian people. Refusing to trade weapons with Israel would send a powerful message of disapproval about Israel's actions while the UK's arms trade with Israel only exacerbates the problem. The only credible approach, and the best way forward for peace, is a complete two-way embargo on all arms sales with Israel.

**Stop Arming Israel, c/o War on Want 56-64 Leonard Street, London EC2A 4LT
www.stoparmingisrael.org**

