# Israeli arms companies and UK defence plans ignite controversy at London trade show



Fifty-one Israeli arms manufacturers, including Israel's largest private defence contractor Elbit Systems and key state-owned firms Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), will be among the 1,600 exhibitors at the upcoming Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) trade show in London’s Docklands. The biennial event, commencing on Tuesday, has become a focal point for controversy and is expected to draw hundreds of protesters, particularly given the ongoing conflict in Gaza. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) has sharply criticised the British government for permitting these companies to participate, accusing it of reaching a "peak complicity in genocide" by allowing the marketing of "genocide-tested weapons" to an international audience.

While the UK government has barred an official Israeli government delegation from attending the event in response to Israel's military operations in Gaza, representatives from Israeli defence contractors are still permitted to exhibit. This distinction follows government concerns over humanitarian issues but stops short of excluding key industry players. According to reports, the Israeli Ministry of Defence has withdrawn its national pavilion and condemned the UK’s decision as politically motivated, saying it "serves extremists" and falls outside the accepted norms of international defence exhibitions. Despite this, Israeli companies attending the fair will continue to receive strong support from their government.

The DSEI trade show is expected to be heavily policed, with security measures reflecting heightened tensions following Hamas's surprise attack on Israel in October 2023. Last year’s event saw significant police operations, including more than 100 officers daily and nearly £2 million spent on security, culminating in ten arrests. This year’s protests could be larger, with organisers anticipating between 500 and 1,000 demonstrators. CAAT highlighted unprecedented interest in anti-arms trade activism, with many protesters likely to focus on Israeli arms companies amid the escalating violence in Gaza City, where hundreds of thousands remain under bombardment.

Another point of contention is the presence of Lockheed Martin, the US defence giant behind the F-35 fighter jets used by the Israeli military. Although the UK has suspended most arms exports to Israel due to humanitarian concerns, it continues to allow British firms to supply components for the F-35 programme on the grounds that the jets are part of a global programme involving multiple countries, including the UK. CAAT estimates that since 2016, UK companies have supplied around £572 million worth of spare parts for F-35s operated by Israel, with firms such as BAE Systems contributing critical systems. These jets, also operated by the Royal Air Force, have been part of the controversial bombardment campaigns in Gaza.

Parallel to the trade show, the UK Ministry of Defence is set to launch a new defence industrial strategy. Defence Secretary John Healey will deliver a keynote address during the event, emphasising the government's intent to make defence a critical driver of economic growth and innovation across the UK. The strategy includes a £250 million fund for five defence growth deals aimed at fostering collaboration between industry, government, and academia nationwide, complemented by an additional £182 million for new defence technical colleges. This initiative aligns with the Conservative government’s plans to increase military spending in response to global security concerns, especially regarding Russian aggression in Ukraine.

The DSEI event encapsulates the persistent dilemma faced by governments balancing arms trade, economic interests, ethical concerns, and geopolitical alliances. The participation of Israeli firms amid ongoing conflict, the UK's differentiated policy on government officials versus corporate exhibitors, and the substantial defence investment plans underscore the complex interplay between diplomacy, defence commerce, and public dissent in today's highly charged political environment.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/08/protests-expected-as-51-israeli-arms-makers-among-exhibitors-at-london-trade-fair), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/08/protests-expected-as-51-israeli-arms-makers-among-exhibitors-at-london-trade-fair), [[6]](https://breakingdefense.com/2025/09/israeli-firms-say-they-will-participate-in-dsei-despite-ban-on-officials/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/08/protests-expected-as-51-israeli-arms-makers-among-exhibitors-at-london-trade-fair), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/1949dbe6f401212a7c7faa6b47c3198b), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/uk-blocks-israeli-officials-its-biggest-defence-show-2025-08-29/), [[6]](https://breakingdefense.com/2025/09/israeli-firms-say-they-will-participate-in-dsei-despite-ban-on-officials/), [[7]](https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/08/29/israeli-defense-ministry-withdraws-from-major-uk-arms-exhibition/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/08/protests-expected-as-51-israeli-arms-makers-among-exhibitors-at-london-trade-fair), [[5]](https://caat.org.uk/news/new-campaign-launched-to-kick-israel-out-of-the-uks-largest-arms-fair/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/08/protests-expected-as-51-israeli-arms-makers-among-exhibitors-at-london-trade-fair)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/08/protests-expected-as-51-israeli-arms-makers-among-exhibitors-at-london-trade-fair)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/08/protests-expected-as-51-israeli-arms-makers-among-exhibitors-at-london-trade-fair)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/08/protests-expected-as-51-israeli-arms-makers-among-exhibitors-at-london-trade-fair> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/08/protests-expected-as-51-israeli-arms-makers-among-exhibitors-at-london-trade-fair> - The article reports that 51 Israeli arms manufacturers, including Elbit Systems, Rafael, and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), are among the 1,600 exhibitors at the biennial DSEI trade show in London. Their participation has sparked protests, with hundreds planning to demonstrate outside the four-day event. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) criticises the UK government's decision to allow these companies to exhibit, accusing it of complicity in genocide. Elbit, Rafael, and IAI are major suppliers to the Israel Defense Forces, which is currently conducting operations in Gaza City.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/1949dbe6f401212a7c7faa6b47c3198b> - The Associated Press article details the UK's decision to bar Israeli government officials from attending the DSEI UK 2025 arms fair in London, scheduled for September 9–12, due to concerns over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. However, representatives from Israeli defense contractors are still permitted to attend. The British government's move follows Israel’s continued military escalation in Gaza, which the UK condemns as wrong. Pro-Palestinian and anti-war groups have announced plans to protest at the event, which will be held at London’s Excel Center.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/uk-blocks-israeli-officials-its-biggest-defence-show-2025-08-29/> - Reuters reports that the UK government has barred Israeli officials from its largest defence trade show, the Defence & Security Equipment International (DSEI), due to Israel’s escalation of military operations in Gaza. Israeli defence companies like Elbit Systems, Rafael, IAI, and Uvision are still allowed to attend. Israel's Ministry of Defence criticised the UK's decision as politically motivated and announced it would withdraw from the exhibition, refusing to set up a national pavilion. The four-day DSEI event is scheduled to open on September 9 at London's Excel centre.
5. <https://caat.org.uk/news/new-campaign-launched-to-kick-israel-out-of-the-uks-largest-arms-fair/> - The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) has launched a new campaign to prevent Israeli companies from exhibiting at the DSEI arms fair in London, scheduled for September 9–12, 2025. CAAT is calling on the UK government, event organisers, and the ExCeL centre to take action to ensure that those responsible for Israel’s actions in Gaza are not allowed to attend DSEI. A petition is calling for the banning of Israeli arms companies and the official government-invited Israeli delegation, as well as banning Israeli speakers and the Israel country pavilion.
6. <https://breakingdefense.com/2025/09/israeli-firms-say-they-will-participate-in-dsei-despite-ban-on-officials/> - Breaking Defense reports that Israel’s three largest defense companies—Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, Israel Aerospace Industries, and Elbit Systems—plan to attend the British Defence Exhibition & Trade Show (DSEI) in London, despite the UK government's decision to not invite an Israeli government delegation in protest of the Gaza conflict. The Israeli Ministry of Defense announced it would withdraw from the exhibition and not have a national pavilion, but Israeli defense industries that choose to attend will still receive full ministry support.
7. <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/08/29/israeli-defense-ministry-withdraws-from-major-uk-arms-exhibition/> - Defense News reports that Israel will not set up a national pavilion at the DSEI UK 2025 exhibition scheduled to take place in London from September 9–12, following the UK's decision to restrict the official participation of Israeli government and military representatives. The Israeli Ministry of Defense criticised the UK's decision as a political step that 'serves extremists, grants legitimacy to terror, and is driven by political considerations that fall outside the professional and customary framework of international defense exhibitions.'