# UK government faces mounting calls to halt arms sales to Israel amid Gaza crisis



## UK Faces Growing Pressure Over Arms Sales to Israel Amid Gaza Conflict

As the situation in Gaza escalates, the new Labour government, under Sir Keir Starmer's leadership, is under increasing scrutiny and criticism for its potential complicity in war crimes by continuing arms sales to Israel. This alarming forecast was articulated by Independent MP Shockat Adam during a parliamentary debate, where he urged the government to recognise the ongoing ethnic cleansing and halt all military cooperation with Israel.

In a stark escalation of its military operations, Israel has recently approved plans for further incursions into Gaza, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis. Reports indicate that the offensive has resulted in over 52,000 Palestinian deaths, with women and children bearing the brunt of the tragedy. Meanwhile, the Israeli government’s intentions to seize control of Gaza further complicate an already beleaguered situation, displacing vulnerable populations while monopolising aid distribution with the help of private security forces.

The UK's historical involvement in arms sales is facing renewed condemnation. Last September, then-Foreign Secretary David Lammy announced the suspension of around 30 arms export licences to Israel, driven by concerns that these might contribute to serious violations of international humanitarian law. However, the continuation of exports—particularly components used in F-35 fighter jets—has sparked serious concern, given their deployment in airstrikes against Gaza. While the government insists that sales of F-35 parts specifically destined for Israel are suspended, it remains questionable how components without a defined destination could still be justified.

During a question session, Adam called out the Prime Minister directly, highlighting the incendiary remarks from the Israeli finance minister, who pledged to "entirely destroy" Gaza and displace Palestinians further. Starmer's response was tepid, downplaying the gravity of the situation while focusing on the need for increased humanitarian aid. “Our focus is on delivering peace for Palestinians and Israelis," Starmer stated, but his administration's inability to take a decisive stance only compounds the problem.

The UK government reportedly granted 108 licences for military and non-military goods to Israel between October 7, 2023, and May 31, 2024. Yet, it consistently denies military equipment to the Palestinian Authority, revealing a troubling double standard in its foreign policy approach that must be addressed.

In parallel developments, a Palestinian NGO, Al-Haq, plans to challenge the UK legally over the exportation of F-35 parts, arguing that these might contravene international humanitarian law given the extensive civilian casualties. The UK government acknowledges the risks but claims that supplying these components is vital for maintaining international peace and security.

The Labour government’s approach to arms sales to Israel is a tightrope walk, reflecting a diplomatic shift from prior policies that unconditionally supported Israel. Starmer's administration appears to be reacting to public pressure, striving to realign British foreign policy with international law while failing to meet the ethical governance standards expected by the public.

Polls indicate that a significant 58% of the public demand a complete halt to arms sales, yet the government hesitates, caught between complex international relations and the need for ethical accountability. Critics argue that symbolic gestures like suspending some arms sales are utterly inadequate in addressing the profound human rights violations at play.

The growing backlash against UK military engagement with Israel, combined with heightened activism from pro-Palestinian groups, signals a crucial moment for potential reconfiguration of British foreign policy. As calls for accountability and ethical governance intensify, it remains to be seen whether the Labour government will respond decisively or continue down a troubling path that risks complicity in war crimes.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/pm-warned-the-uk-risks-the-hague-over-gaza-if-arms-sales-to-israel-do-not-end/a397061197.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/palestinian-ngo-ask-uk-court-block-f-35-parts-israel-over-gaza-war-2024-11-18/> - A Palestinian NGO, Al-Haq, is challenging the UK in court over its export of F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel, arguing that these components could be used in violation of international humanitarian law in Gaza. Despite suspending several arms export licenses, the UK exempted F-35 parts, citing global program impacts. British government acknowledges potential breaches of humanitarian law by Israel but opted to continue supplying F-35 components to maintain international peace and security. The legal proceedings follow significant casualties in the Gaza conflict, with over 43,800 deaths reported by Hamas's Gaza health ministry since October 2023. Al-Haq's case against the UK's Department for Business and Trade will likely be heard in early 2025. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/palestinian-ngo-ask-uk-court-block-f-35-parts-israel-over-gaza-war-2024-11-18/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://elpais.com/internacional/2024-09-08/el-delicado-equilibrio-de-starmer-para-castigar-a-israel-sin-romper-platos.html> - Keir Starmer, the British Prime Minister, faces a delicate balance between condemning Israel and maintaining stable political relations. Known for celebrating Jewish traditions with his family, he has worked to eliminate antisemitism from the Labour Party. This week, Starmer suspended export licenses for 30 weapon components to Israel, irritating Netanyahu's government and concerning the UK's Jewish community. This move aims to distance from the previous Conservative government, fostering a legalistic approach respectful of international humanitarian law. The decision has limited practical impact, as the UK is not a significant arms supplier to Israel. Foreign Secretary David Lammy emphasizes a 'realistic progressivism' combining human rights and legal compliance. The symbolic measure has drawn both internal and external criticism, positioning the UK as a defender of international legality. ([elpais.com](https://elpais.com/internacional/2024-09-08/el-delicado-equilibrio-de-starmer-para-castigar-a-israel-sin-romper-platos.html?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/09/03/the-uk-partially-suspends-its-arms-sales-to-israel_6724560_4.html> - The new Labour government in the UK, under Prime Minister Keir Starmer, has decided to partially suspend arms sales to Israel. Foreign Secretary David Lammy announced the suspension of 30 out of 350 arms export licenses to Israel, effective immediately, due to concerns that these weapons might be used in Gaza, potentially violating international humanitarian law. This decision represents a significant diplomatic shift from previous Conservative policies and comes amid ongoing tensions in Gaza. The suspension, though largely symbolic, signifies a shift in the UK's stance on foreign policy concerning Israel and its use of military force. While Israel primarily imports arms from the US and Germany, the UK's decision marks a notable departure from its traditionally close alignment with American foreign policy. Lammy emphasized that the suspension is a legal precaution and not meant to undermine Israel’s right to self-defense. The move has generated varying reactions within the Labour Party and has differences from positions previously held by Starmer before becoming prime minister. ([lemonde.fr](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/09/03/the-uk-partially-suspends-its-arms-sales-to-israel_6724560_4.html?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/014ba6d3-3e94-4ff0-b287-5087651edb86> - The 'Political Fix' podcast from the Financial Times, hosted by Lucy Fisher, features a discussion on Labour's relationship with business, particularly concerning Keir Starmer's planned overhaul of employment laws. The episode highlights Labour's interventionist stance, leading to apprehension among business leaders about the implications of new policies. Starmer's commitment to growth and wealth creation is juxtaposed with the potential burden of additional regulations on businesses. Discussants include Jim Pickard and Miranda Green, who explore the specifics of the employment rights package and the nuances of business reactions. Additionally, the podcast delves into the political and regulatory landscape, including Labour's tougher stance on water companies, the consequences of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and the implications of the Tory leadership race. Another major segment discusses Labour's policy shifts on Israel under Starmer's leadership, including the suspension of some export licenses and resuming UNRWA funding, with insights from the FT’s Middle East editor, Andrew England. The episode explores Starmer's balancing act between human rights and political pressures both domestically and internationally. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/014ba6d3-3e94-4ff0-b287-5087651edb86?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://time.com/7013366/as-britain-pivots-on-gaza-calls-for-an-arms-embargo-grows/> - Following the Labour Party's victory in July's elections, Britain’s new government is under increasing pressure to alter its stance on the Israel-Gaza conflict. Foreign Secretary David Lammy reinstated funding to UNRWA and dropped plans to challenge the ICC's jurisdiction over Israeli leaders accused of war crimes. However, calls from pro-Palestinian activists and human rights groups to suspend arms sales to Israel have intensified, exacerbated by a recent diplomat resignation in protest of the UK's inaction. Public sentiment largely supports halting arms sales, with 58% in favor, reflecting widespread demands for an immediate ceasefire. The government is conducting a comprehensive review to assess possible Israeli war crimes, with outcomes delayed due to complexities distinguishing offensive and defensive weapon use. Similar historical precedents of arms embargoes on Israel during conflicts raise the expectation for decisive action that could influence global allies like the U.S. to pressure Israel towards compliance with international law. ([time.com](https://time.com/7013366/as-britain-pivots-on-gaza-calls-for-an-arms-embargo-grows/?utm_source=openai))