# Labour government faces legal challenge over F-35 arms exports to Israel amid Gaza crisis



In London, the discourse around arms exports has reached a fever pitch, particularly regarding Israel, following the recent elections that saw the Labour party rise to power. At a recent protest, a demonstrator wore a mask of Labour leader Keir Starmer, standing next to a replica of an MK-84 bomb, a stark illustration of public frustration against the new government's arms sales policies. Campaigners are incensed that the Labour-led administration continues to export fighter jet components to Israel, despite prior commitments to suspend arms transfers amidst humanitarian crisis reports.

At the heart of this controversy is a High Court judicial review initiated by the Palestinian human rights group Al-Haq, questioning the validity of the UK government's decision to allow the shipment of F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel. While Labour did halt some arms export licenses to Israel last September, they inexplicably maintained the export of F-35 components. The rationale provided by the government—that these exports are vital for fulfilling NATO obligations—has left many unconvinced, particularly given the dire humanitarian implications.

Critics argue that merely transferring parts to Israel through the United States does not free the UK from its obligations under international law and the Geneva Conventions. This irresponsible stance could, they contend, amount to complicity in acts of genocide against Palestinians. The urgency of this issue is amplified by distressing data, with over 43,800 fatalities reported in Gaza since the conflict escalated in October 2023.

The UK's arms sales practices are not isolated; similar conflicts are unfolding in Europe as well. In the Netherlands, a court is pondering whether the Dutch government is breaching international law by selling weapons to Israel, reflecting a growing European push for accountability regarding arms sales and their moral and ethical implications. The Dutch Foreign Minister has even suggested that any visit from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would lead to his arrest, signaling the broader ramifications of this arms trade.

The global F-35 manufacturing initiative, involving the UK, US, and NATO nations, has increasingly become a target for civil society. Over 230 organizations have recently called for an immediate cessation of arms transfers to Israel, emphasizing the urgent ethical need to reassess such policies. Activists argue that justifications for continued exports crumble under scrutiny, especially given the civilian casualties resulting from these weapons.

The latest protests and legal challenges highlight a resounding call for greater accountability from governments amidst ongoing violence. Al-Haq has accused the Labour government of “utter contempt” for Palestinian lives, illustrating the stark divide between government acknowledgment of potential war crimes and its continued complicity in arms exports.

As courts prepare to weigh in on these critical issues, the atmosphere is rife with urgency for a decisive shift in policy that prioritizes humanitarian consequences over geopolitical interests. The need for a government move away from arms complicity in conflict zones will only continue to grow.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/gallery/2025/may/12/an-arms-trade-protest-and-a-tyre-change-photos-of-the-day-monday> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/2e20a05d-4290-4fb2-94a4-b3f587289722> - The UK government, led by Sir Keir Starmer, is facing a High Court judicial review initiated by the Palestinian human rights group Al-Haq regarding its continued export of components used in the F-35 fighter jets deployed by Israel. Although the Labour government suspended some arms export licences to Israel in September due to allegations of breaches in international humanitarian law during operations in Gaza, it allowed the continued export of F-35 components, citing global obligations and potential risks to international security, particularly for NATO. The government argues there was no “actual knowledge” of breaches, while campaigners claim the decision fails to meet the UK's duty to prevent genocide and protect civilians under the Geneva Conventions. They argue that the indirect export of parts to Israel via the U.S. does not lessen their role in the conflict. The government maintains that its actions are consistent with domestic and international law, while campaigners criticize the rationale as flawed and insufficient in addressing the legal and humanitarian implications.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/8d9596666f269d44b1653d3ac1cd2afd> - A Dutch court is examining a lawsuit arguing that the Netherlands is violating international law by selling weapons to Israel. Pro-Palestinian activists assert that these arms sales contravene the 1948 Genocide Convention. This follows the International Criminal Court's issuance of arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials for alleged war crimes during a 13-month conflict in Gaza. The Hague District Court will decide on December 13 whether to ban Dutch arms exports to Israel, having already halted the export of F-35 parts earlier. Dutch officials deny any wrongdoing, emphasizing thorough consideration of international obligations. The Dutch Foreign Minister has confirmed that any arrival of Netanyahu on Dutch soil would result in his arrest as per ICC obligations. This has stirred political reactions, notably from right-wing leader Geert Wilders, reflecting tensions within the Dutch coalition government.
4. <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.
5. <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/25926.html> - Over 230 global civil society organisations have called on governments producing F-35 fighter jets to immediately halt all arms transfers to Israel, including the F-35 jets. The F-35 jet programme partners include Australia, Canada, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, UK and US (lead partner). Civil society organisations around the world have taken legal action to hold their governments accountable for the F-35 programme, and complicity in Israel’s crimes in Gaza. This letter has been sent to the relevant Government Ministers of F-35 programme partner nations, which include: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, UK and US.
6. <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/23826.html> - Less than 24 hours before a crucial hearing in the High Court the UK’s Foreign Secretary announced that the UK was suspending equipment assessed to be used in the current conflict in Gaza “such as important components which go into military aircraft, including fighter aircraft, helicopters and drones, as well as items which facilitate ground targeting.” However, parts for the F-35 for the global supply programme were exempted from the suspension, even if the government know they could or would end up in Israel’s hands. GLAN and Al-Haq, who are engaged in on-going litigation on the UK’s failures to halt weapons exports to Israel, will now analyse whether the government is acting in accordance with UK law by exempting the F35 components and will pursue accountability in court.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/14/no-human-rights-concern-would-stop-uk-selling-f-35-parts-for-israel-say-ngos> - If F-35s using British parts were used “by Israel or senior Israeli officials to commit or facilitate serious violations” of humanitarian law, lawyers for the campaigners argue, ministers “would not even take them into account”. Their position is based on a previous submission from the government’s legal team. That said the UK accepts that the UK-made components for F-35 jets “might be used” by Israel to commit war crimes. But, the government argues, the continued export of F-35 components was nevertheless justified for wider reasons of “international peace and security”, because the fighter jets parts are supplied to a wider pool of countries as well as Israel. Shawan Jabarin, Al-Haq’s general director, accused the government of displaying “utter contempt” for Palestinian life. “It is outrageous that, despite acknowledging the clear risk that F-35 components could be used by Israel to commit serious violations of international law, including genocide, the government continues to export the components,” Jabarin added.