# UK government's F-35 exports to Israel face legal challenge amid Gaza crisis



The UK government's prioritisation of the F-35 jet fighter programme over its fundamental legal obligations regarding arms export controls raises significant ethical concerns, particularly against the backdrop of the newly formed Labour government. This controversial stance comes to the forefront as a momentous legal case initiated by Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq progresses through the courts. The stakes have never been higher, with allegations that the UK may have unlawfully supplied parts for the F-35 programme, contributing to Israel's military actions against the Palestinians in Gaza.

The case has garnered support from British human rights organisations including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, all rallying around the argument that the UK’s ongoing supply of F-35 components to Israel fundamentally undermines its own laws, which restrict arms exports in the face of potential serious violations of international humanitarian law. Lawyers representing Al-Haq point out that relying on the F-35’s global supply chain to justify these exports is not only misguided but legally questionable.

Even more troubling is the government’s prior admission that supplying F-35 components might breach existing arms export control laws. Yet, officials maintain that halting these supplies would jeopardise international peace, thereby prioritising military alliances over adherence to humanitarian principles. Defence Secretary John Healey has echoed this sentiment, warning that disrupting the supply chain could diminish US confidence in the UK and provoke a rift within NATO.

Notably, the recent suspension of 30 arms export licences right before the court appearance highlights the competing interests in the UK’s arms trade with Israel. The absence of a suspension on F-35 parts indicates a troubling prioritisation of global military programmes over pressing humanitarian concerns, an issue that has only deepened as casualties rise in Gaza. With over 41,000 Palestinians, including 15,000 children, having lost their lives amid relentless bombardment, the government's stance appears increasingly untenable.

This week’s hearings serve not only as a judicial process but as part of a global momentum. Similar legal actions in countries like the Netherlands press for governmental responsibilities to act against what could be construed as genocide, showcasing a rising tide of accountability that the UK government seems keen to ignore.

Human rights advocates remind us that the Genocide Convention obliges states to take affirmative steps to prevent genocide. The ongoing arms supplies to Israel directly contradict this mandate. Yasmine Ahmed of Human Rights Watch highlights the government's grave oversight in not adequately assessing the risks associated with arms exports, suggesting a blatant disregard for its legal and moral responsibilities.

Legal implications are poised to extend far beyond export laws. Should the court endorse the government’s position that the Geneva Conventions apply only with a formal declaration of genocide, it would severely undermine the very tenets of crime prevention. Charlotte Andrews-Briscoe from Al-Haq has labelled the government's argument as a “flagrant” violation of human rights, worsening an already dire situation in Gaza.

As the court case progresses, the outcomes have the potential to reshape arms export policies and the enforcement of international humanitarian law in the UK. Observers internationally are acutely aware that the decisions made in this context could serve as critical precedents for future humanitarian crises. In this politically tumultuous landscape, the delicate balance between maintaining national security and adhering to moral accountability is not merely an academic debate—it has real-world consequences that demand urgent scrutiny and reform.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/12/uks-f-35-exports-more-important-than-stopping-genocide-lawyers-to-argue> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/12/uks-f-35-exports-more-important-than-stopping-genocide-lawyers-to-argue> - The UK government is set to argue in court that maintaining its role in the F-35 jet fighter programme is more important than adhering to arms export controls or obligations to prevent genocide in Israel. The case, initiated by Palestinian human rights group Al-Haq and supported by organizations like Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, questions whether the UK has unlawfully supplied parts for the F-35 programme that could be used by Israel in attacks on Palestinians in Gaza. The four-day hearing begins this week and has been pending for nearly a year.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/dutch-state-sued-over-alleged-failure-stop-israels-violations-international-law-2024-10-10/> - Palestinian and Dutch organizations have filed a legal complaint against the Netherlands for allegedly failing to prevent Israel from committing possible genocide in Gaza and other violations of international law. The case argues that the Netherlands has a legal obligation to stop such violations under the 1948 Genocide Convention. The plaintiffs seek a ban on Dutch exports of weapons and dual-use goods to Israel and a prohibition on business linkages related to Israel's activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. The case is scheduled to be heard in November.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/palestinian-ngo-ask-uk-court-block-f-35-parts-israel-over-gaza-war-2024-11-18/> - 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. The UK government acknowledges potential breaches of humanitarian law by Israel but continues supplying F-35 components to maintain international peace and security. The legal proceedings are expected to be heard in early 2025.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/18/campaigners-urge-f-35-fighter-jet-producing-nations-to-stop-supplying-israel> - Over 230 global civil society organizations 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 program partners include Australia, Canada, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, UK, and US. Civil society organizations around the world have taken legal action to hold their governments accountable for the F-35 program and complicity in Israel’s actions in Gaza. The letter has been sent to the relevant government ministers of F-35 program partner nations.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/14/no-human-rights-concern-would-stop-uk-selling-f-35-parts-for-israel-say-ngos> - NGOs argue that the UK government's position on supplying F-35 parts to Israel disregards human rights concerns. Despite acknowledging the risk that UK-made components for F-35 jets might be used by Israel to commit serious violations of international law, the government continues to export these components, citing reasons of international peace and security. Lawyers representing the campaigners argue that the government is not taking into account the potential use of these components in violations of humanitarian law.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/sep/02/uk-suspends-30-arms-export-licences-to-israel-after-review> - The UK government has suspended 30 of its 350 arms export licenses to Israel after a two-month internal review raised concerns about Israel's conduct in the conflict in Gaza. The suspension specifically relates to concerns around the treatment of Palestinian detainees and the supply of aid to Gaza. However, the suspension does not include F-35 components, which have been exempted due to their role in the global F-35 programme and the potential impact on international peace and security.