

UK military support to Israel could be breach of international law

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Then-Defense Secretary John Healey visits RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus on October 2, 2024

Alongside its direct military intervention in Yemen, the UK has protected Israel's military infrastructure during its escalation against Iran, a report says [File: Yui Mok/Getty Images]

London, January 28 (RHC)-- The United Kingdom's military collaboration with Israel during its assault on Gaza, as well as its support through arms provisions, logistical aid, and direct military interventions in Yemen to support Israel's objectives, could constitute a breach of international law, a new report reveals.

The report, released on Tuesday by the British Palestinian Committee (BPC), says while the UK government has not been directly perpetrating violence in Gaza, it has "played an influential role" through the validation of arms licences and wider, deeper military collaboration with Israel.

UK-made F-35 parts, sent directly to Israel and other partner countries for assembly, have played a significant role in maintaining the Israeli jets for combat by contributing to the global pool of spare parts, which Israel can access.

In taking such actions, the UK is not "simply failing to meet its third-party responsibilities to uphold international law," it is actively complicit in Israel's genocide of the Palestinian people, the report said. Additionally, while the British military has supplied Israel with these critical components, it has also developed a deeper military collaboration with Israel.

"This two-way partnership supports Israeli companies in the development of technology that is used to kill Palestinians and deepens collaboration between the British and Israeli militaries," the report said, adding that the British military bases in Cyprus have served as a "foundational asset" for Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Alongside its direct military intervention in Yemen, the UK has protected Israel's military infrastructure during its escalation against Iran, the report said, focusing on the UK's military joining efforts to shield Israel's military infrastructure from an anticipated Iranian response in April 2024.

This came after Israel bombed an Iranian consulate building in Syria's capital Damascus, killing at least 13 people, including two Syrian civilians. "UK ministers and officials know that the UK has obligations under international law," Sara Hussein, BPC director, told Al Jazeera.

"They have recognized that Israel's illegal occupation is ongoing and they have been made aware by the world's highest court that Israel's actions in Gaza plausibly amount to genocide.

"We are, therefore, calling on the government to immediately impose a two-way arms embargo, end all forms of military collaboration, and uphold the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. If not, the British government should face appropriate legal consequences."

UK's official policy, outlined in its Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, says it will not grant an arms export licence "if it determines there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law," said the group.

In April 2024, six months into the war on Gaza, then-Foreign Minister David Cameron said the UK would not halt arms sales to Israel by British companies. He defended his decision a month later by claiming that they represent "less than 1 percent" of Israel's arms imports.

In September 2024, the UK suspended 30 out of 350 arms export licences to Israel, citing a "clear risk" that they could be used in serious breaches of international humanitarian law.

Since then, the British government has issued 34 arms export licences to Israel, including three open licences which allow the export of an unlimited number and value of goods.

In the 19-page report, the BPC concluded that the UK is legally obligated to take measures to prevent genocide and to prosecute individuals or entities responsible for committing such acts, both within its own jurisdiction and, where feasible, internationally.

The group also stressed that the obligation of states to prevent genocide is a proactive rather than a passive action and entails the concept of “due diligence”, necessitating an assessment based on factual evidence.

In 2022, the UK supplied 42 million pounds (\$53 million) worth of arms to Israel, according to media reports.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA and NEWS AGENCIES]

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