



BRIEFING PAPER

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UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia: Q&A

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Contributing Authors: Noel Dempsey, arms transfers data

Summary

The conflict in Yemen has drawn attention to UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has been accused of committing violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) during its military operations in Yemen.

The UK is not a member of the Saudi-led Coalition but Saudi armed forces are using UK built and licensed arms in Yemen, including Typhoon aircraft, missiles and bombs.

The Government has resisted pressure from opposition parties and backbench MPs to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Campaign groups actively lobby MPs to make this point.

One group, the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) took the UK government to court to obtain a Judicial Review of arms sales to Saudi Arabia. The High Court rejected their claim in 2017. However, in June 2019 the Court of Appeal concluded the Government's decision-making process for granting export licenses was "irrational" and therefore "unlawful".¹

Liam Fox, the Secretary of State for International Trade, said the Government will not grant any new licenses for export to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners that might be used in the conflict in Yemen while it considers the implications of the judgement for decision-making. He also said the Government intends to seek permission to appeal.² Permission to appeal to the Supreme Court was granted on [9 July 2019](#).

This briefing paper focuses on UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia. The Library regularly publishes material on the situation in Yemen, most recently in '[Yemen's fragile peace process](#)' (CBP8536, 7 March 2019) and '[Yemen update: Autumn 2018](#)' (CBP8433, 2 November 2018). The House of Lords International Relations Committee published a report '[Yemen: Giving Peace a Chance](#)' in February 2019 (HL Paper 290 of session 2017–19).

Box 1: What are arms exports?

Arms exports are the export of military and dual-use items (that could have military or civilian use) to other nations. The export of these items is controlled, to ensure the Government knows what is being exported, where it is being exported to and for whom. Items that are 'controlled' need a license to be exported. The Government assesses license applications against eight Criteria. Commons Library briefing paper '[An Introduction to UK arms exports](#)' explains this in greater detail and is available on the Library website.

¹ [CAAT versus Secretary of State and Others full judgement](#), 20 June 2019, para 138; [Letter from the International Trade Secretary regarding Appeal Court Judgement dated 24 June 2019](#), Committees on Arms Export Controls, 3 July 2019

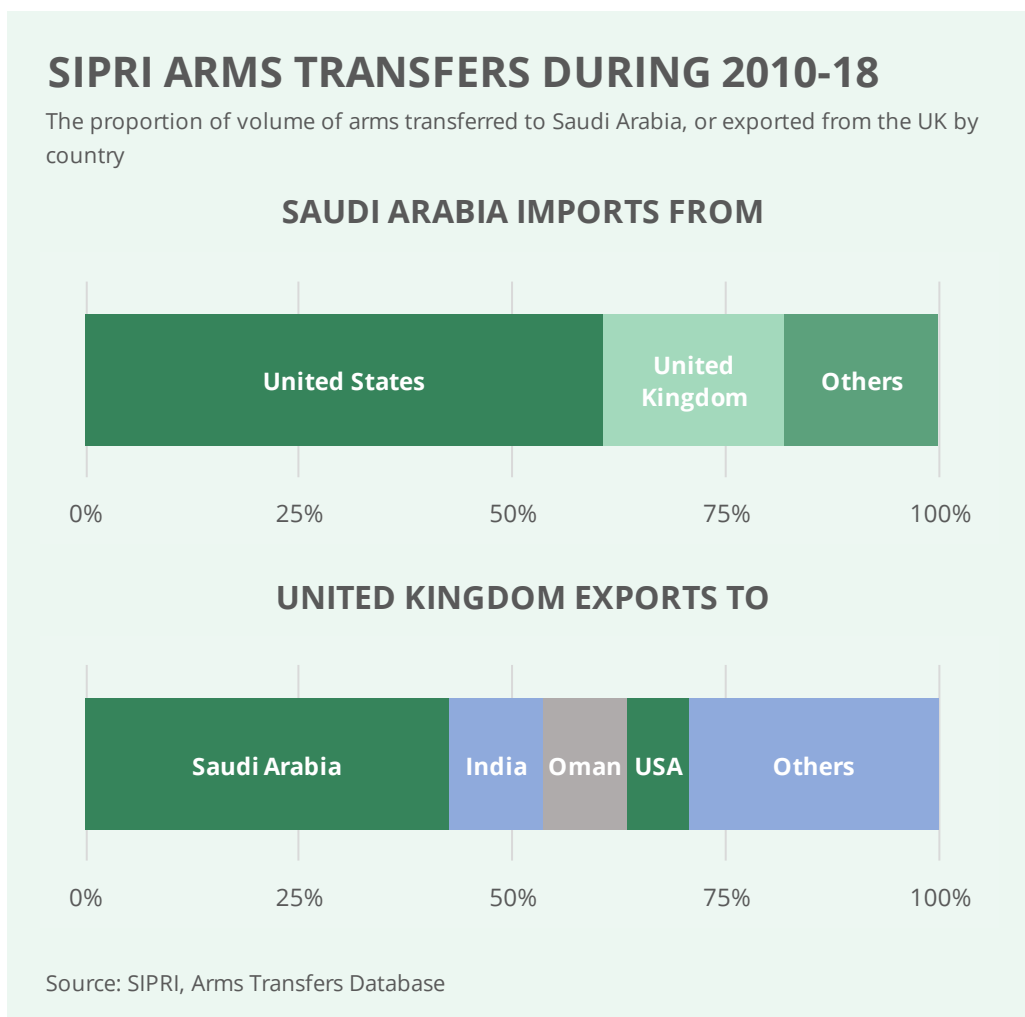
² [HC Deb 20 June 2019 c374](#)

1. Does the UK export arms to Saudi Arabia?

Yes. The Middle East is a major market for UK defence exports and Saudi Arabia is the largest buyer of UK arms.

According to the SIPRI Arms Transfer Database the UK was the second largest exporter of arms transfers to Saudi Arabia (after the US) between 2010 and 2018, and larger than all other countries combined. The UK accounted for around 21% of the arms imports to Saudi Arabia.

Between 2010 and 2018 Saudi Arabia was the largest importer of arms from the UK; the total volume of arms transfers was around 43% of the UK's total arms export volume.



The UK and Saudi have a Government-to-Government defence cooperation programme under which the UK has exported Typhoon, Tornado and Hawk aircraft, mine countermeasure vessels and associated munitions,

infrastructure, logistics and manpower support packages.³ Further analysis of arms exports to Saudi Arabia is available in Commons Library briefing paper '[UK Defence Industry Exports](#)'.

1.1 What kind of arms does the UK export to Saudi Arabia?

The Government does not provide exact figures on arms exported to Saudi Arabia or any other country.⁴ Data on exports are based on the value of export licenses granted rather than individual contracts. The data does provide broad categories of goods but does not provide specifics. The Campaign Against Arms Trade, which opposes arms exports to Saudi Arabia, [says](#) that of the £4.6bn worth of arms licensed for Saudi Arabia since March 2015, £2.7 billion worth were ML10 licenses (aircraft, helicopters, drones) and £1.9 billion were ML4 licenses (grenades, bombs, missiles, countermeasures).

Typhoon combat aircraft and associated systems dominate UK exports to the Kingdom. The final six Typhoon combat aircraft of 72 ordered in 2007 were delivered in 2017. In March 2018 Saudi signed a Memorandum of Intent with the UK to buy an additional 48 Typhoons.⁵

1.2 Is the UK part of the Saudi-led Coalition?

No. The UK is not a member of the Saudi-Led Coalition. Nor does it have any role "in setting Coalition policy, or executing air strikes in Yemen."⁶

However, the UK does provide considerable support to the Saudi armed forces beyond that provided in support of exported equipment. In the year after Saudi began its campaign in Yemen (March 2015) the UK Government:

accelerated delivery of Paveway precision-guided bombs; provided increased training in targeting and weapon use to help improve Saudi processes; provided liaison officers in Saudi headquarters to observe Saudi processes, increase the UK's insight into the air campaign and help to improve maritime access to Yemeni ports by identifying vessels that may be breaching the arms embargo; and scoped and met Saudi training needs to help strengthen defences at the Saudi southern border which has suffered repeated cross border raids.⁷

The Government says it is not involved in targeting decisions. The Government says the liaison officers "are not involved in carrying out strikes, directing or conducting operations in Yemen or selecting targets and are not involved in the Saudi targeting decision-making process".⁸

³ Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2017, para 5.3

⁴ [PQ168984](#), 6 September 2018

⁵ "Saudi Arabia signs MOI for 48 more Typhoons", Jane's Defence Weekly, 2018; "[UK-Saudi Arabia Joint Communiqué](#)", 10 March 2018

⁶ [PQ168984](#), 6 September 2018

⁷ Committees on Arms Export Controls, The use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen, [written evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#), UK0013, 13 April 2016, para 29

⁸ Committees on Arms Export Controls, The use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen, [written evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#), UK0013, 13 April 2016

1.3 The granting of licenses

The Department for International Trade is the licensing authority for strategic exports from the UK. The Export Control Organisation is responsible for issuing licenses.

The export control system is made up of several elements.

International bodies, to which the UK belongs, provide specialist advice in identifying items that need to be controlled. These items are collated in the UK Strategic Export Control List, more commonly known as the Consolidated List.

Applications to export items on the list are assessed against eight criteria, found in the 2008 EU Common Position and the UK national criteria. In the UK, these criteria are referred to as the Consolidated Criteria. The eight criteria require the Government to, among other things, respect international obligations and commitments and consider the risk of an item being used for internal repression.

Commons Library briefing paper [‘An Introduction to UK arms exports’](#) explains this process in greater detail.

Regarding exports to Saudi Arabia, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary Department for International Trade said in 2017:

The Government takes its export licensing responsibilities very seriously and our processes have been subjected to public and judicial scrutiny.

The Government operates a rigorous and robust process to ensure that any licences for UK defence exports are consistent with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria.

[...]

The key test for the Government for our continued arms exports to Saudi Arabia in relation to International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is whether there is a clear risk that those weapons might be used in a serious violation of IHL. The situation is kept under careful and continual review.⁹

⁹ PQ11490, 28 November 2017

2. Are UK weapons being used in violations of International Humanitarian Law in Yemen?

This is the key argument of those calling for the Government to halt arms exports.

The Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) lobbies MPs to halt arms sales to the Kingdom. Its [‘Stop Arming Saudi’ campaign](#) contains resource material on the conflict in Yemen. CAAT argues the UK Government “has continued to support Saudi air strikes in Yemen and provide arms despite overwhelming evidence of repeated breaches of international humanitarian law”.

[Amnesty International](#) argues: “States that are still supplying arms to the Saudi Arabia-led coalition risk going down in history as being complicit in war crimes in Yemen” and “all parties to the conflict in Yemen have repeatedly committed violations of international law resulting in horrific suffering for civilians”. Amnesty also argues: “there is extensive evidence that irresponsible arms flows to the Saudi Arabia-led coalition have resulted in enormous harm to Yemeni civilians”.¹⁰

The House of Lords International Relations Committee published a report [‘Yemen: Giving Peace a Chance’](#) in February 2019. The committee discussed the UK’s role in Yemen and offered the following conclusion on arms exports:

73. We recognise that there are legitimate reasons for UK arms exports overseas. Export licensing decisions for the sale of arms always require fine judgements, balancing legitimate security concerns against human rights implications, and each situation must be assessed individually. The Government asserts that, in its licensing of arms sales to Saudi Arabia, it is narrowly on the right side of international humanitarian law. Although conclusive evidence is not yet available, we assess that it is that it is narrowly on the wrong side: given the volume and type of arms being exported to the Saudi-led coalition, we believe they are highly likely to be the cause of significant civilian casualties in Yemen, risking the contravention of international humanitarian law.¹¹

The House of Commons International Development Committee and Business, Innovation and Skills Committee concluded in their 2016 joint report:

Given that the UK has a long history of defence exports to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners, and considering the evidence we have heard, it seems inevitable that any violations of international

¹⁰ [‘Yemen: three years on, US and UK arms supplies to Saudi Arabia-led coalition are devastating civilian lives’](#), Amnesty International, 23 March 2018

¹¹ House of Lords International Relations Committee, [‘Yemen: Giving Peace a Chance’](#) 16 February 2019, HL Paper 290 of session 2017–19

humanitarian and human rights law by the coalition have involved arms supplied from the UK.¹²

A [UN Group of Experts](#) tasked by the UN Human Rights Council to investigate Yemen examined allegations of violations of IHL. Their report, published in August 2018, said Coalition air strikes have caused most of the documented civilian casualties (there were 16,706 civilian casualties between March 2015 and June 2018). The report said air strikes have hit residential areas, markets, funerals, weddings, detention facilities, civilian boats and medical facilities. The Group said the cases investigated by them “raise serious concerns about the targeting process applied by the coalition”.

The Group concluded it has “reasonable grounds to believe that the parties to the armed conflict in Yemen have committed a substantial number of violations of international humanitarian law” and that “individuals in the Government and the coalition, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, may have conducted attacks in violation of the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution that may amount to war crimes”.¹³

Britain’s role in the war in Yemen was the subject of a Channel 4 [Dispatches programme](#) broadcast in April 2019. The programme investigated “the extent to which the war in Yemen is made in Britain”. It interviewed British technicians working in Saudi Arabia maintaining Royal Saudi Air Force Typhoon aircraft. One technician said, “if we weren’t there in 7 to 14 days there wouldn’t be a jet in the sky.” Aaron Merat, a former Tehran correspondent for the Economist, extensively explores British defence links with Saudi Arabia in a long-read article for the [Guardian](#) (18 June 2019).

2.1 What does the Government say?

When asked directly to estimate the number of UK-supplied individual missile systems used against civilian targets in Yemen, the Foreign Office said “we are unable to provide precise figures for the number of weapons exported. Nor do the Coalition publish information on which weapons are used for specific air strikes.”¹⁴ Middle East Minister Alistair Burt said he could not say whether any civilian deaths were the result of British bombs or plans because “there is no tracking of the use of arms supplied by the UK”.¹⁵

The Government has acknowledged that UK-built and licensed Typhoon and Tornado aircraft and weapons (including Paveway precision-guided bombs and small numbers of Dual Mode Brimstone and Storm Shadow missiles) have been deployed in Yemen by the Royal Saudi Air Force.¹⁶

In December 2016, the then Secretary of State for Defence, Sir Michael Fallon, told the House that an investigation by the Saudi-led coalition had

¹² [The use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen](#), Business, Innovation and Skills and International Development Committees, HC 679, 15 September 2016, p3

¹³ [A/HRC/39/43](#), 24 August 2018, para 108

¹⁴ [PQ168984](#), 6 September 2018

¹⁵ [HC Deb 11 September 2018 c651](#)

¹⁶ Committees on Arms Export Controls, [The use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen, written evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#), UK0013, 13 April 2016

confirmed that a small number of UK-supplied cluster munitions exported to Saudi Arabia in the 1990s had been used by the coalition in Yemen in January 2016, and the Kingdom had undertaken not to use UK-supplied cluster munitions again.¹⁷

2.2 Criticism of Saudi's Joint Incident Assessment Team

The UK Government has pointed to the Saudi-led Coalition's Joint Incident Assessment Team when asked about allegations of violations of IHL:

We believe it is right for the Saudi-led Coalition in the first instance to conduct thorough and conclusive investigations into incidents where it is alleged that international humanitarian law has been breached. The Coalition has the best insight into its own military procedures and will be able to conduct the most thorough and conclusive investigations.¹⁸

The MOD has also said it does not investigate allegations of violations of international humanitarian law because it "does not have access to all the information that would allow us to reach conclusions accurately".¹⁹

However, the JIAT has been criticised by UN experts and Human Rights Watch, among others.

The UN Group of Experts expressed "serious concerns" about the JIAT's "independence and its ability to carry out impartial investigations" which suggests "the coalition does not have a mechanism consistent with the Basic Principles and Guidelines"²⁰ on the rights of victims of IHL violations. Their conclusions prompted Alison Thewliss MP to remark that "not only is the Saudi coalition marking its own homework, but it cannot be trusted to do so".²¹

Human Rights Watch analysed the work of the JIAC over a two-year period, concluding "it failed to meet international standards regarding transparency, impartiality, and independence".²² Both the UN Group of Experts and the HRW reports contain investigations of allegations of individual incidents of violations of IHL.

The UK Government has pointed to the JIAT's conclusion that mistakes were made in an airstrike on a bus on 9 August 2018 that killed 51 people as an example of UK influence in ensuring proper accountability.²³

¹⁷ [HC Deb 19 December 2016 c1215-6](#)

¹⁸ [PQ169233](#), 11 September 2018

¹⁹ [HL3707](#), 13 December 2017

²⁰ [A/HRC/39/43](#), 24 August 2018, annex III

²¹ [HC Deb 11 September 2018 c640](#)

²² "[Yemen: Coalition fails to curb Violations](#)", Human Rights Watch, 24 August 2018

²³ [HC Deb 4 September 2018 c10](#)

3. What do MPs think?

The Labour party has called for an independent UN-led investigation of all allegations of war crimes in Yemen and for the suspension of UK arms sales for use in the conflict until the investigation is complete.²⁴

The [SNP](#), the [Liberal Democrats](#) and [Plaid Cymru](#) similarly favour a suspension of exports, with several MPs backing this view in debates on Yemen on [11 September 2018](#) and [23 May 2019](#).

39 backbench MPs have signed an EDM condemning the export of arms to 'repressive regimes' ([EDM 305](#)).

MPs discussed the Court of Appeal ruling (see next section) on [20 June 2019](#).

Committees on Arms Export Controls splits

The four committees that form the Committees on Arms Export Controls (CAEC) were split over the conclusions of its inquiry on UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia during the 2015-17 Parliament. Two of the four select committees – the International Development Committee and the Business, Innovations and Skills Committee – favoured suspending all arms exports. The Foreign Affairs Committee did not endorse suspension, while the Defence Committee did not associate itself with either report. CAEC ceased to function after this split for the remainder of that Parliament.

CAEC re-formed after the 2017 election and is currently looking into [UK arms exports in 2017](#).

²⁴ [HC Deb 22 October 2018 c82](#); [HC Deb 20 June 2019 c377](#)

4. The Judicial Review

In June 2019 the Court of Appeal concluded that the UK Government's decision-making process in approving export licenses for arms to Saudi Arabia was irrational and therefore unlawful. The Government said it intends to seek permission to appeal the judgement.

4.1 The High Court judgement

In 2017 the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) took the UK government to court to obtain a Judicial Review of arms sales to Saudi Arabia. CAAT's case focused on Criterion 2c of the [Consolidated Criteria](#), which states the Government will "not grant a license if there is a clear risk the items might be used in the commission of a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law".²⁵

The High Court rejected CAAT's claim in July 2017 and the Secretary of State for International Trade updated the House at the time in a [statement](#) saying:

The judgment recognises the rigorous and robust processes that we have in place across Government to ensure that UK defence exports are licensed consistently with the Government's consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

Thereafter the Government frequently referred to the High Court judgement when asked about the legality of UK arms sales: "the High Court's judgment of July 2017 confirmed that we have in place a robust and rigorous process for assessing export licensing decisions for Saudi Arabia".²⁶

CAAT sought permission to appeal the judgement. This appeal was heard in April 2019.

4.2 Court of Appeal judgement

The Court of Appeal gave its [judgement](#) on 20 June 2019.

The Court of Appeal said the Government, as part of its decision-making process in granting licenses, is required by criteria 2c (as outlined above) to consider the "clear risk... of serious violations of IHL".

Sir Terence Etherton, Master of the Rolls, said in the summary of the judgement:

The Government made no concluded assessments of whether the Saudi-led coalition had committed violations of international humanitarian law in the past, during the Yemen conflict, and made no attempt to do so.²⁷

²⁵ Commons Library briefing paper '[An Introduction to UK arms exports](#)' explains the Consolidated Criteria and the Government's decision-making process for granting export licenses.

²⁶ [PQ169167](#), 11 September 2018

²⁷ [CAAT versus Secretary of State and Others press summary](#), 20 June 2019

Sir Terence continued:

there was a legal obligation (as a matter of rationality) to make a systematic assessment of past possible violations, not necessarily in every case but, where possible, before deciding whether there is a clear risk of future serious violations. On that point, the appeal has succeeded and the decision of the High Court is overturned.²⁸

In the [full open judgement](#) the Court said “we have concluded it was irrational and therefore unlawful for the Secretary of State to proceed as he did”.²⁹

The Court ordered the Government to pay the Claimant’s reasonable costs.

Sir Terence Etherton continued the courts “are not concerned with the merits of the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia”. He explained what this means for the Government:

The decision of the court today does not mean that licenses to export arms to Saudi Arabia must immediately be suspended. CAAT did not ask for such an order. It does mean that the UK government must reconsider the matter, must make the necessary assessments about past episodes of concern, allowing for the fact that, in some cases, it will not be possible to reach a conclusion. The government must then estimate the future risks in light of their conclusions about the past.³⁰

Government response

Liam Fox, the Secretary of State for International Trade, told the House the Government intends to seek permission to appeal:

The consequence ([of the judgement] is that we are remitted to reconsider our decisions in accordance with the correct legal approach. As I said earlier, we disagree with the judgment and will seek permission to appeal.

We are carefully considering the implications of the judgment for decision making. While we do this, we will not grant any new licences for exports to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners that might be used in the conflict in Yemen.³¹

The Secretary of State later added “we will review all licences in the light of the Court’s judgment”.³² Liam Fox also [informed](#) the Chair of the Committees on Arms Export Controls of the Government’s response to the Court of Appeal’s judgement.

Liam Fox reaffirmed the Government’s intention to seek permission to appeal in a [letter](#) to the Chair of the Committees on Arms Export Controls on 24 June. The Government had until 27 June to [apply for permission](#) to appeal and/or for a stay of execution.

Permission to appeal to the Supreme Court was [granted](#) on 9 July 2019. The Government’s request for a stay was refused. CAAT was given permission to appeal the dismissal of grounds 2 and 4.³³

²⁸ [CAAT versus Secretary of State and Others press summary](#), 20 June 2019

²⁹ [CAAT versus Secretary of State and Others full judgement](#), 20 June 2019, para 138

³⁰ [CAAT versus Secretary of State and Others press summary](#), 20 June 2019

³¹ [HC Deb 20 June 2019 c376](#)

³² [HC Deb 20 June 2019 c378](#)

³³ [CAAT versus Secretary of State and Others](#), Court of Appeal, 9 July 2019

MPs views

MPs discussed the judgement following Liam Fox's [oral statement](#) on 20 June 2019.

Barry Gardiner, the Shadow Secretary of State for International Trade, called for a "[full parliamentary or public inquiry](#)" into what he described as the "serious breach of this Government's duty of care with regard to export licences".

Stewart Hosie, responding for the SNP, asked the Secretary of State whether in reconsidering licensing decisions The International Trade Secretary will take into account "the deep concern, anguish and anxiety that there are substantial human rights abuses emanating from Saudi Arabia?".³⁴

14 MPs, including from Plaid Cymru and the SNP, have signed an Early Day Motion ([EDM 2556](#)) calling the Government to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia:

That this House recognises the decision by the Court of Appeal to rule UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia as unlawful; regrets that the UK has licenced nearly £5 billion of arms exports to Saudi Arabia since the start of the Yemen war, in which Saudi Arabia has been leading a coalition of airstrikes; further regrets the bombing in Yemen has created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, which, according to the UN, has seen at least 7,070 civilians being killed and 11,205 injured, with 65 per cent of deaths attributed to Saudi-led coalition air strikes; and urges the UK Government to comply with the court ruling to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia and all other repressive regimes.

5. Have any other countries stopped supplying weapons to Saudi Arabia?

The death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi embassy in Turkey in October 2018 reignited the debate about arms exports in the US and Europe.³⁵

During a [debate](#) in the Commons on the death of Khashoggi on 22 October 2018 several MPs, including the shadow Foreign Secretary, called on the Government to suspend arms sales. Jeremy Hunt said: “we keep the situation constantly under review, and that will include any implications that arise from the results of the Khashoggi investigation”.³⁶

European countries

Analysis by SIPRI, a leading source of data on the global arms trade, found that “after the United States, EU member states were among its main suppliers, with the UK and France, in particular, being the 2nd and 3rd largest ones in 2014–18”.³⁷

EU nations apply the same Consolidated Criteria as the UK. Some have taken action to restrict exports to Saudi Arabia and/or members of the Coalition, including the Netherlands, Denmark, the Flemish part of Belgium and Germany.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in October 2018 “there will be no arms exports to Saudi Arabia” until the murder of Khashoggi is “cleared up”.³⁸

Both [France](#) and the [UK Government](#) have raised concerns with Germany about the effect of the ban on multinational defence projects (notably Typhoon). The Committees on Arms Export Controls questioned the UK Government on the German ban in an [exchange of letters](#) in spring 2019.

In March 2019 Germany extended this moratorium for a further six months, saying “over this period no new export applications will be approved”.³⁹ The ban has reportedly [caused friction](#) within the governing coalition. Reuters also reported that, to assuage French and British concerns, the German Government agreed to extend for nine months export licences that had already been granted, provided the companies undertook not to deliver any finished weapon systems until the end of the year. The UK Foreign Secretary said in April 2019 Berlin had agreed that spares for existing

³⁵ A UN investigation concluded Khashoggi was “the victim of a premeditated extrajudicial execution, for which the State of Saudi Arabia is responsible”. The [report](#), by Agnes Callamard, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary killings, was the result of a six-month investigation and published on 19 June 2019.

³⁶ [HC Deb 22 October 2018 c82](#)

³⁷ “[Legal challenges to EU Member States’ arms exports to Saudi Arabia: current status and potential implications](#)”, SIPRI, 28 June 2019

³⁸ “[Merkel: No German arms exports to Saudi until killing cleared up](#)”, Reuters, 22 October 2018

³⁹ “[Germany extends Saudi arms sale ban for another six months](#)”, Reuters, 28 March 2019

Typhoon and Tornado aircraft in Saudi Arabia may continue to be licensed.⁴⁰

Spain briefly said it would halt the sale of laser-guided bombs but later reversed its decision.⁴¹ Others, like **France** and **Italy**, have continued to license arms exports, taking a similar view to the UK.

The **European Parliament** passed a non-binding resolution in October 2018 calling on the European Council “to reach a common position in order to impose an EU-wide arms embargo on Saudi Arabia”.⁴²

Giovanna Maletta, a researcher for SIPRI (the leading source of data on the arms trade), has analysed the differing approaches adopted by EU states on arms exports to Saudi Arabia, concluding:

EU member states are clearly struggling to find a common European approach to the question of whether they should adopt more restrictive export policies towards countries involved in the conflict in Yemen on the basis of the EU Common Position. The variety of practices demonstrates the obstacles in promoting a common approach in the field and how the types of considerations and risk analyses that countries make when authorizing transfers are still very much rooted in national interests and positions.⁴³

Further commentary on divisions within Europe over arms exports to Saudi Arabia, and the potential implications for the EU export control regime, is available from [SIPRI](#), the [International Institute for Strategic Studies](#) and by [Saferworld](#).

United States

The Trump administration has resisted pressure from Members of Congress to halt arms sales.⁴⁴ Members of Congress voted on two occasions, in April and June, to block arms sales to the kingdom. The Trump administration vetoed the first and is expected to veto the second.⁴⁵

Section 1290 of the [John McCain National Defence Authorisation Act 2019](#) requires the Secretary of State to certify the Coalition is taking “demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure resulting from military operations”.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ [Letter from the Foreign Secretary, regarding Germany’s moratorium on arms exports to Saudi Arabia, dated 10 April 2019](#), Committees on Arms Export Controls, 22 May 2019

⁴¹ “Spain backtracks on suspending laser-guided bomb sale to Saudi Arabia”, Jane’s Defence Industry, 13 September 2018

⁴² “MEP’s demand end to EU arms exports to Saudi Arabia”, European Parliament, 25 October 2018. See also the [text of the resolution](#).

⁴³ [“Legal challenge to EU Member States’ arms exports to Saudi Arabia: current status and potential implications”](#), SIPRI, 28 June 2019

⁴⁴ [“Remarks by President Trump before Air Force One departure”](#), the White House, 20 October 2018; [“Remarks by President Trump with Pastor Andrew Brunson”](#), the White House, 13 October 2018

⁴⁵ [“Senate blocks huge arms sales to Saudis: Trump pledges veto”](#), Breaking Defense, 20 June 2019

⁴⁶ [“The War in Yemen: A compilation of legislation in the 115th Congress”](#), Congressional Research Service, R45046, 21 August 2018

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[Defense News](#) examines Congress's role in arms sales. A more detailed account of US arms sales to Saudi Arabia can be found in Congressional Research Briefing Paper '[Saudi Arabia: background and US relations](#)'.

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