

Research Briefing
22 May 2024
Number 9964

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UK arms exports to Israel

Summary

During the 2023/24 Israel-Hamas conflict, some MPs in the UK Parliament have raised [concerns about UK arms exports to Israel](#), citing a risk that they could be used to violate international humanitarian law.

At the International Court of Justice, South Africa has accused Israel of [international humanitarian law violations in its military operations in Gaza](#). Israel's Government states it is "committed" to conducting its military operations "[in accordance with international law](#)" and will investigate any alleged misconduct by its forces.

The UK Government has decided not to suspend existing licences or stop granting licences for export of arms to Israel and that all arms export licences are kept under review.

UK concerns about arms exports to Israel

In the UK, the [SNP](#) and the [Liberal Democrats](#) are calling on the Government to suspend export licences to Israel and not to grant any new licences.

Other organisations, such as [Campaign Against Arms Trade](#) (CAAT) and [Saferworld](#), are also calling for the UK to halt arms exports to Israel.

Government response to concerns

Ministers have responded to such concerns by referencing the [UK's strategic export licencing system](#), under which all applications for a licence to export military equipment and related items are assessed against a set of criteria, and emphasised [Israel's right to defend itself](#) within the bounds of international humanitarian law. The [export criteria](#) reflect, among other things, the UK's obligations under international law, and the potential for the goods to be used in the violation of human rights.

The Secretary of State for Defence, Grant Shapps, says that [UK defence exports to Israel are "relatively small"](#), amounting to £42 million in 2022. Figures for the whole of 2023 will be published on 13 June 2024. The Government also intends to [publish an ad-hoc release](#) of statistics on export licences to Israel for the period 7 October 2023 to end of May 2024. This is expected to be published around 7 June 2024.

Since 2008, the UK has licenced arms worth over £574 million to Israel, according to [analysis of Government export data by CAAT](#), a UK based pressure group that seeks an end to the global arms trade.

The Government says [export licences are kept under review](#) (PDF) and can be amended, suspended, refused or revoked as circumstances require. The Government [undertook a review of existing and pending licences](#) (PDF) in December 2023.

On 18 December 2023 the Business and Trade Secretary, Kemi Badenoch, decided not to suspend existing licences or stop granting licences, but to keep her decisions "under careful review".

On 8 April 2024, following a further review, and advice from the Foreign Secretary, Kemi Badenoch decided that [the government's position "would remain unchanged"](#) (PDF).

Further information about events in Gaza and Israel can be found in Commons Library briefings:

- [2023/24 Israel-Hamas conflict: UK actions and response](#)
- [2023/24 Israel-Hamas conflict: US, UN, EU and regional response](#)

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How are licences granted?

Any UK company wanting to export military or dual-use (that could have military or civilian use) goods to other nations must apply for a licence from the Government to do so.

A list of items which require a licence for export is set out in the UK [Strategic Export Control Lists](#) (also known as the consolidated list). This list includes equipment, software and technology.

The [Export Control Joint Unit](#) (ECJU) is responsible for processing licence applications. The unit sits within the Department for Business and Trade, and it draws together expertise from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Ministry of Defence. The Secretary of State for Business and Trade is responsible for arms export controls.

The ECJU assesses licence applications against the [Strategic Export Licencing Criteria](#). These reflect, among other things, the UK's obligations under international law, and if there is a clear risk that the items might be used to "commit or facilitate" internal repression or a serious violation of international humanitarian law (Criteria 2a and 2c).

More information on arms exports, the process for granting licences and some of the most commonly raised concerns can be found in Commons Library briefing [An introduction to UK arms exports](#). More information on the criteria can be found in Commons Library research briefing [UK amends its criteria for arms exports](#).

1 How to find information about arms exports

The Department for Business and Trade publishes data on the number of licences issued, refused, rejected or revoked to individual countries on a [quarterly and annual basis](#). A [searchable database](#) provides information on specific licence types, destinations and goods.

The amounts given when quoting export licences do not indicate the actual value of exports shipped, only the value of goods that licence holders are allowed to export. Nor does the data identify the company granted the licence or the exact item being exported.

Codes are used to denote broad categories of items. For example, code ML10 refers to aircraft, components for aircraft and related equipment. The Government does not publish data on the value of goods exported under open licences, which allow an exporter to export multiple shipments of specified items to specified destinations.

Commons Library briefing [UK arms exports: statistics](#) explains more about the different type of licences issued, what data on arms exports is available and what it tells us.

2 Information on UK arms exports to Israel

The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), a UK-based pressure group that seeks an end to the global arms trade, has created a searchable database using [Government data on export licences](#). CAAT data shows the [UK granted licences worth £574 million](#) for companies to export to Israel since 2008, the year country-level data was first made available.

A significant proportion of this total was in 2017, when £221 million worth of licences were approved.¹ CAAT says the single biggest licence in value, worth £182 million, was issued in October 2017, for “technology for military radars”.² Analysis by CAAT shows many of the licences granted were for components for military radars, electronic warfare and targeting equipment. Licences were also granted for components of aircraft and helicopters.³

In January 2023, the UK Government published a list of licences granted, rejected or revoked to Israel between July 2017 and June 2022 in response to a request by the Commons Committees on Arms Export Controls.⁴

In 2022, the Government granted 114 standard individual export licences to Israel for military goods valued at £42 million.⁵

During the first six months of 2023, the Government granted 40 standard individual and incorporated licences for military goods with a combined value of £16 million.⁶

¹ Campaign Against Arms Trade, [UK export licence data: Israel](#), 2008 to present, accessed 12 February 2024

² Campaign Against Arms Trade, [Country profiles: Israel](#), accessed 12 February 2024

³ Campaign Against Arms Trade, [UK export licence data: Israel](#), 2008 to present, accessed 12 February 2024

⁴ Committees on Arms Exports Controls, [Developments in UK Strategic Export Controls – Government response](#) [PDF], CP 775, 9 January 2023

⁵ [HC Deb 30 November 2023 c1050](#)

⁶ Department for Business and Trade, [Strategic export controls: licensing statistics](#), 1 April to 30 June 2023, table 1; [Strategic export controls: licensing statistics](#), 1 January to 31 March 2023, table 1. Incorporation SIELs are for goods that are due to be incorporated, that is, installing them into another product or higher-level system. For incorporation cases there are two end-user types. The ‘end user’ is the person/organisation incorporating the goods. The ‘ultimate end user’ is defined as the entity that uses the product or the higher-level system into which the exported goods are installed or incorporated.

2.1

Arms exports since 7 October 2023

Information on licences granted since 7 October 2023 is not yet available. In May, the Department for Business and Trade announced that licensing statistics for the third quarter (1 July to 30 September 2023) and fourth quarter (1 October to 31 December) of 2023 will be published on 13 June 2024.⁷

The [Chair of the Business and Trade Committee wrote to the Foreign Secretary and the Business and Trade Secretary](#) on 4 April 2024 asking for the data for licences granted since October 2023 to be published, adding:

the Committee would find it unacceptable to receive a response stating that it will have to wait for their publication, because the Government has already included some of this information in its submission to the recent Judicial Review application.⁸

The Business and Trade Secretary declined to do so, explaining in response:

To provide comprehensive statistics in advance of the Official Statistics publication would undermine our commitments to provide high quality, reliable and valuable statistics, equally available to all, that are released in an orderly and transparent way, in line with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and the Code of Practice for Statistics.⁹

In an oral evidence session on 21 May, Liam Byrne, the chair of the Business and Trade Committee, told ministers that the delay to the publication of quarterly statistics was “completely unacceptable”.¹⁰ Alan Mak, the Minister for Industry and Economic Security, said his department will be publishing an ad-hoc bulletin with export licence data for Israel covering the period 7 October 2023 to the end of May 2024. Mr Mak said this will be published around the 7 June 2024. The Minister said this will include the number of extant licences, applications, and licences that have been granted or refused for this period.¹¹

Open licences

The published statistics on export licences granted do not include the value of military goods exported under an [open general export licences](#) (OGELs).

⁷ Department for Business and Trade, [Strategic export controls: licensing statistics: 1 July to 30 September 2023](#), updated 8 May 2024; [Strategic export controls: licensing statistics: 1 October to 31 December 2023](#), updated 8 May 2024

⁸ Business and Trade Committee, [letter from the chair to the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs](#) [PDF], 4 April 2024

⁹ Business and Trade Committee, [Letter to the chair from the Secretary of State for Business and Trade](#) [PDF], dated 25 April 2024

¹⁰ Business and Trade Committee, [UK arms exports to Israel – oral evidence](#), 21 May 2024

¹¹ Business and Trade Committee, [UK arms exports to Israel – oral evidence](#), 21 May 2024

These are pre-published licences allowing the export of certain goods to certain destinations. Generally, the quantity of goods allowed for shipment is not limited.¹²

In relation to the current Israel– Hamas conflict, CAAT has highlighted UK industry contributions to F-35 combat aircraft, which CAAT says are “currently being used in the bombardment of Gaza”.¹³

The Lockheed Martin F-35 combat aircraft, known as Lightning II in UK service, is a US-led aircraft programme and is flown by many air forces around the world.

[CAAT has mapped all the UK companies](#) it says are involved in manufacturing components for the F-35 combat aircraft in the UK.¹⁴ CAAT says these components are exported using an [open general licence](#), which allows for multiple shipments of specified items to specified destinations.¹⁵

Liam Byrne, the chair of the Business and Trade Committee, asked the Department for Business and Trade if it had reviewed the open licence for exports in support of the F-35 has been reviewed since October 2023. Greg Hands, the Minister for Trade Policy, said in response “all export licences, including Open General Export Licences, are kept under careful and continual review as standard.”¹⁶

In response to a question from Joanna Cherry (SNP) to publish information on all the arms export licences to Israel currently in force, including open licences, in November 2023 the Business and Trade Secretary said: “I do not believe that is something that I am able to do or should do”.¹⁷

3 Review of licences to Israel

The Government’s responses to parliamentary questions about arms exports often state licences are kept under “careful and continual review”:

Decisions on export licensing are based on the UK's Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. The Government's export licences are kept under careful and continual review, and we can amend, suspend or revoke extant licences, or

¹² Department for Business and Trade, [Strategic export controls: licensing statistics](#), 1 April to 30 June 2023

¹³ Campaign Against Arms Trade, [Statement on UK arms exports to Israel](#), 17 October 2023

¹⁴ Campaign Against Arms Trade, [Mapped: All the UK companies manufacturing components for Israel's F35 combat aircraft](#), 2 February 2024

¹⁵ See Department for Business and Trade, [Open general export licence \(exports in support of joint strike fighter: F-35 Lightning II\)](#), published 6 January 2014

¹⁶ PQ19282 [[Open General Export Licence: F-35 aircraft](#)], 27 March 2024

¹⁷ [HC Deb 30 November 2023 c1050](#)

refuse new licence applications, where they are inconsistent with these criteria.¹⁸

Israel's military action in Gaza, in response to Hamas' attacks on 7 October 2023, has prompted calls by MPs and others for the Government to review and consider suspending existing arms export licences to Israel.

MPs have also questioned the process by which the Government reviews licences.

In December 2023, the Government provided information about both the process and the outcome of reviews in response to legal proceedings brought by two organisations, the [Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq](#) and the UK-based [Global Legal Action Network \(GLAN\)](#).¹⁹ The High Court dismissed the case on 19 February 2024. On appeal, at an oral hearing in the High Court on 23 April 2024, GLAN and Al-Haq were granted a full hearing, set for October 2024.²⁰

Ministers have also responded to questions by MPs in the House of Commons and from the [Business and Trade](#) and the [Foreign Affairs](#) select committees, in oral evidence and written correspondence.

3.1 Decisions to continue to grant licences

According to government documents submitted to the court, on 18 December 2023 the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, Kemi Badenoch, decided, following a review, not to suspend or stop granting export licences to Israel. Instead, she decided to “keep her decisions about whether or not to grant, revoke, or refuse licences under continuing, careful review, in view of the current hostilities in Gaza”.²¹

On 9 April 2024, Lord Cameron, the Foreign Secretary, said during a trip to Washington that he had “reviewed the most recent advice” and the “latest assessment leaves our position on export licenses unchanged”.²²

¹⁸ PQ13287 [[L3Harris: F-35 aircraft](#)], 13 February 2024; See also: HL192 [[Arms Trade: Israel](#)], 8 February 2024; PQ12824 [[Arms Trade: Israel](#)], 8 February 2024; PQ15431 [[Turkey: Arms trade](#)], 22 June 2021; PQ181106 [[Ethiopia: Arms trade](#)], 19 April 2021; HL2262 [[Arms Trade: Saudi Arabia](#)], 26 October 2016

¹⁹ GLAN law, [Summary Grounds of the Secretary of State](#) [PDF], AC-2023-LON-993634, 12 January 2024

²⁰ GLAN law, [UK arms export challenge revived, expedited and now set for a full hearing in October](#), 23 April 2024

²¹ GLAN law, [Summary Grounds of the Secretary of State](#) [PDF], AC-2023-LON-993634, 12 January 2024

²² US State department, [Secretary Antony J. Blinken and United Kingdom Foreign Secretary David Cameron at a Joint Press Availability](#), 9 April 2024

GLAN's summary of court documents revealed during the 23 April High Court hearing states that the Foreign Secretary made that decision on 3 April, and on 8 April the Business and Trade Secretary took the decision to not suspend any extant licences and to continue to grant new licences.²³ This was confirmed in a letter from the Business and Trade Secretary to the chair of the Business and Trade Committee on 25 April.²⁴

3.2 The review process

An explanation of how the Government has reviewed licences, and how the Business Secretary came to her decision of 18 December 2023, is laid out in the [Government's submission to the High Court](#) (PDF) in December 2023.²⁵

According to this submission, the Government undertook a review of export licences to Israel following Hamas' attack on 7 October 2023. This involved:

- A Change in Circumstances review of extant (existing) and pending export licences to Israel.
- The creation of an International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Compliance Assessment Process, known as IHLCAP, within the FCDO's Middle East and North Africa Directorate to assess "Israel's commitment and capability to comply with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and its past record of compliance with IHL".²⁶

The Change in Circumstances review identified 28 extant (existing) licences and 28 pending applications as involving equipment "which was most likely to be used by the IDF in offensive operations in Gaza".²⁷ Extant licences included components for: combat aircraft, utility helicopters, armoured personnel carriers, naval vessels, radars and targeting equipment.

The IHLCAP team produced three assessments in the time period covered by the legal submission. Its first assessment, dated 10 November 2023, said the volume of strikes and the total death toll, including the proportion of those who are children, "raise serious concerns" and the FCDO was seeking further information from the Israeli Government.

²³ GLAN law, [UK arms export challenge revived, expedited and now set for a full hearing in October](#), 23 April 2024

²⁴ Business and Trade Committee, [Letter to the chair from the Secretary of State for Business and Trade](#) [PDF], dated 25 April 2024

²⁵ GLAN law, [Summary Grounds of the Secretary of State](#) [PDF], AC-2023-LON-993634, 12 January 2024

²⁶ GLAN law, [Summary Grounds of the Secretary of State](#) [PDF], AC-2023-LON-993634, 12 January 2024

²⁷ GLAN law, [Summary Grounds of the Secretary of State](#) [PDF], AC-2023-LON-993634, 12 January 2024, para 29

The final assessment, dated 8 December, concluded (emphasis as in original):

[...] we are satisfied that we do have sufficient information on compliance to inform our overarching view of Israel's compliance with IHL that the record of compliance does not reveal a pattern suggestive of unaddressed underlying systemic weakness which might undermine other material pointing towards an ability and willingness to comply with IHL.²⁸

The [Export Control Joint Unit](#) (ECJU), which sits in the Department for Business and Trade and is responsible for assessing export licence applications, presented the Foreign Secretary with three options:

Option 1: Not to suspend or revoke extant licences but to keep them under careful review;

Option 2: To suspend extant licences where it is assessed that the items might be used in carrying out or facilitating IDF military options in the current conflict;

Option 3: To suspend all extant licences to the IDF.²⁹

On 12 December 2023 the Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron, decided that he was “satisfied that there was good evidence to support a judgment that Israel is committed to comply[ing] with IHL” and decided to recommend option 1 to the Secretary of State for Business and Trade.³⁰

On 18 December 2023, the Business and Trade Secretary “took the decision not to suspend extant export licences to Israel, nor to stop granting export licences, but rather to keep her decisions about whether or not to grant, revoke, or refuse licences under careful review”.³¹

The legal submission explained the Business and Trade Secretary reached this decision “on the basis of all the evidence available to her, that there is not at present a clear risk that items exported to the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law”.³²

The IHL cell

The FCDO has provided some information about the IHL cell in response to tabled parliamentary questions by Liam Byrne. The Deputy Foreign Secretary, Andrew Mitchell, said the FCDO has a “small bespoke capability”

²⁸ GLAN law, [Summary Grounds of the Secretary of State](#) [PDF], AC-2023-LON-993634, 12 January 2024

²⁹ GLAN law, [Summary Grounds of the Secretary of State](#) [PDF], AC-2023-LON-993634, 12 January 2024, para 49

³⁰ As above, para 50

³¹ As above, para 52

³² As above, para 1

to look specifically at IHL issues in the context of the Israel/Gaza conflict.³³ He also said that the cell's approach to assessment of IHL compliance by Israel "is informed by a methodology adopted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office following a request by the Campaign Against Arms Trade in 2017 for a judicial review of export licensing decisions for Saudi Arabia during the conflict in Yemen."³⁴

The Government has indicated it does not intend to publish the IHL cell's assessments because "legal advice to Ministers and policy assessments related to it are confidential."³⁵

Foreign Secretary's decision-making process

The Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron, set out in a letter to the chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee the methodology the FCDO uses to assess export licences against criterion 2c of the [strategic export licensing criteria](#). Criterion 2c states that the Government will "not grant a 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".³⁶

Lord Cameron said the methodology draws on open-source evidence, intelligence, accounts of diplomatic and ministerial engagements, and correspondence with the relevant country, saying "the resulting policy assessments are not 'legal' judgements but are informed by legal advice." He said the evidence base of the assessments includes analysis of:

- a) The overall nature and dynamics of the conflict, covering the political, military, humanitarian and human rights context;
- b) Statements made by credible NGOs [non-governmental organisations], international bodies and partner countries relating to the country's adherence to IHL;
- c) Evidence from the country in question, including statements made by its government and military representatives, and information regarding its military structures, processes and training; and
- d) The country's record of compliance, including legal analysis of specific allegations of IHL violations.³⁷

Lord Cameron has also said that to "announce today that we will change our approach to arms exports, it would make Hamas stronger and make a hostage deal less likely".³⁸

³³ PQ19286 [Armed conflict: International law], 27 March 2024

³⁴ PQ19288 [[Armed conflict: International law](#)], 27 March 2024

³⁵ PQ19287 [[Armed conflict: International law](#)], 27 March 2024

³⁶ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Letter from the Foreign Secretary](#) [PDF], dated 15 April 2024

³⁷ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Letter from the Foreign Secretary](#) [PDF], dated 15 April 2024

³⁸ [UK ban on selling arms to Israel would strengthen Hamas](#), BBC News, 12 May 2024

3.3 April 2024 decision

During oral evidence on 9 January 2024, the Foreign Secretary told the Foreign Affairs Committee that “if circumstances change and we reach a different view, we would advise the Department of Trade accordingly”.³⁹

Following the hearing at the High Court on 23 April 2024, the Global legal Action network (GLAN) summarised information from new government documents revealed in court.⁴⁰

According to GLAN, the documents show that since 18 December, when the decision to not revoke extant licences to Israel and to continue to grant new licences was made, there have been five legal assessments of the situation in Gaza (IHL compliance evidence bases). On 28 March 2024 the Foreign Secretary received a submission of IHL compliance assessments of Israel for the period 18 December to 29 February 2024. On 3 April the Foreign Secretary concluded that it was not necessary to recommend the suspension of any extant licences.⁴¹ On 8 April, the Business and Trade Secretary decided not to suspend extant licences and to continue to grant new licences.⁴²

GLAN adds the IHL assessments of Israel are “lengthy and detailed (around 25 to 30 pages)” and include:

an overview of the conflict; analysis of the humanitarian context; a review of Israeli Government statements relevant to IHL; information regarding Israeli military operations, including identification of alleged incidents of particular concern; and analysis of statements by international bodies, States and NGOs relevant to Israel’s compliance with IHL.⁴³

3.4 The ICC’s application for arrest warrants

On 20 May 2024 Karim Khan, the prosecutor for the [International Criminal Court](#) (PDF), which is dedicated to prosecuting individuals for “the most serious crimes of international concern”, filed applications for arrest

³⁹ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Oral evidence: Work of the FCDO](#), HC 325 2023-24, 9 January 2024, q631

⁴⁰ GLAN law, [UK arms export challenge revived, expedited and now set for a full hearing in October](#), 23 April 2024

⁴¹ GLAN law, [UK arms export challenge revived, expedited and now set for a full hearing in October](#), 23 April 2024

⁴² GLAN law, [UK arms export challenge revived, expedited and now set for a full hearing in October](#), 23 April 2024

⁴³ GLAN law, [UK arms export challenge revived, expedited and now set for a full hearing in October](#), 23 April 2024

warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, Israel's Minister of Defence (alongside arrest warrants for three senior figures in Hamas) .⁴⁴

Karim Khan said he had "reasonable grounds to believe" that the two men "bear criminal responsibility" for "war crimes and crimes against humanity" committed in Gaza during the recent Israel-Hamas conflict.⁴⁵

Andrew Mitchell, the Deputy Foreign Secretary, said in a statement to the Commons on the same day that "the fact that the prosecutor has applied for arrest warrants to be issued does not directly impact UK licensing decisions" adding "we will continue to monitor developments as part of our assessment process".⁴⁶

Mr Mitchell said the Government does not think that the ICC has jurisdiction in this case: "The UK has not recognised Palestine as a state, and Israel is not a state party to the Rome statute [which established the ICC]".⁴⁷

Some MPs disagreed with the Government's position; Brendan O'Hara, shadow SNP spokesperson (foreign affairs) said "if today does not put an end to the UK licensing of arms exports to Israel, absolutely nothing will".⁴⁸

Lord Cameron, the Foreign Secretary, was questioned about the implications of the court's announcement for the UK and arms exports. Lord Cameron said "Our position on export licences remains unchanged but, of course, we keep this under review."⁴⁹

3.5

Previous reviews of export licences

The Government has reviewed arms export licences to Israel before.

In July 2009, following a review into whether UK-supplied equipment may have been used during Israel's 'Operation Cast Lead' in Gaza, the Labour Government revoked five export licences for naval gun components.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Section 2.6 of Commons Library briefing 2023/24 [Israel-Hamas conflict: UK actions and response](#) discusses in more detail the role of international courts.

⁴⁵ International Criminal Court, [Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: Applications for arrest warrants in the situation in the State of Palestine](#), 20 May 2024

⁴⁶ [HC Deb 20 May 2024 c655](#)

⁴⁷ [HC Deb 20 May 2024 c648](#)

⁴⁸ [HC Deb 20 May 2024 c650](#)

⁴⁹ [HL Deb 21 May 2024 c945](#)

⁵⁰ HC Deb 21 April 2009 c8-9WS; [Britain revokes arms licences for Israeli Navy guns](#), The Guardian, 13 July 2009; Committees on Arms Export Controls, [Scrutiny of Arms Export Controls: UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2008, Quarterly Reports for 2009, licensing policy and review of](#)

In August 2014, following the [outbreak of hostilities](#) between Israel and Hamas and other armed groups in Gaza the previous month, the Coalition Government announced that it had identified 12 export licences for components which could be part of equipment used by the Israeli Defence Forces in Gaza.⁵¹ The Government noted a ceasefire was in place, but added “in the event of a resumption of significant hostilities, the government is concerned that it would not be able to clarify if the export licence criteria are being met. It would therefore suspend these licences as a precautionary step”.⁵²

In July 2015 the Conservative Government announced the outcome of a review of export licensing for Israel. The Government said that, 11 months after the establishment of a ceasefire, “there is now sufficient information from a wide variety of sources to apply standard export licensing procedures... without any additional measures”.⁵³

4 Parliamentary scrutiny of arms exports

4.1 Select Committees

The Committees on Arms Export Controls has ceased to exist. On 23 January 2024, the Business and Trade, Foreign Affairs and International Development Committees outlined plans for future parliamentary scrutiny of strategic export controls: core responsibility for scrutiny will rest with the [Business and Trade Committee](#).⁵⁴ Both this committee and the [Foreign Affairs Committee](#) have questioned ministers about arms exports to Israel in recent oral evidence sessions and in written correspondence, which can be found on their committee websites.

The Business and Trade Committee had intended to question ministers on 24 April, the day after the High Court hearing involving GLAN and Al-Haq.⁵⁵

[export control legislation](#) - Memoranda from Rt Hon Ivan Lewis MP, Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Arms Exports to Israel Received 22 July 2009

⁵¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Government announces findings into review of licensed exports to Israel](#), 12 August 2014. This paragraph was corrected on 5 March 2024 to clarify the Government identified 12 licences that it would suspend in the event of a resumption of significant hostilities, rather than had suspended the licences.

⁵² Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Government announces findings into review of licensed exports to Israel](#), 12 August 2014

⁵³ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Review of export licensing procedures for Israel](#), 14 July 2015

⁵⁴ Business and Trade, Foreign Affairs and International Development Committees, [Joint Special Report](#), 23 January 2024, HC 436 23 January 2024

⁵⁵ Business and Trade Committee, [Oral evidence: UK arms exports to Israel](#) [PDF], 24 April 2024, HC 690

However, the chair of the Committee, Liam Byrne, said the committee was told by the Deputy Foreign Secretary that no minister was available.⁵⁶

On 21 May, the Business and Trade Committee heard from Andrew Mitchell, the Deputy Foreign Secretary, and Alan Mak, Minister for Industry and Economic Security at the Department for Business and Trade. The committee pressed Ministers on the release of statistical data (see section 2.1), the review process, the F-35 programme among other issues.⁵⁷

4.2

Debate in the Commons

In 2023 and 2024, MPs have asked the Government to consider revoking arms export licences to Israel in relation to the current conflict with Hamas. Several MPs raised this with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade during oral questions on 30 November 2023.⁵⁸ Zarah Sultana (Lab) also led a debate on arms exports to Israel on 12 December 2023.⁵⁹

Several debates on the situation in Gaza have been held since then, including in response to ministerial statements and urgent questions from the Labour Party, on [26 March 2024](#), [17 April 2024](#), [7 May 2024](#) and [21 May 2024](#). Commons Library briefing [2023/24 Israel-Hamas conflict: UK actions and response](#) includes parliamentary responses to the conflict.

The SNP, as set out by Defence Spokesperson Martin Docherty-Hughes, is calling on the UK Government “to cease extending arms licences to the state of Israel and to immediately halt the export of weapons or components”.⁶⁰

The Labour party has not called for arms exports to be suspended. Wayne David, the Shadow Minister for the Middle East, has said the party is asking the Government “for a guarantee that the export criteria will be applied vigorously and robustly to Israel in the light of the conduct of the conflict in Gaza”.⁶¹

David Lammy, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, has called for clarity on whether the legal advice given to the Foreign Secretary said that there “is a clear risk that items licensed by the UK might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law”.⁶² He has also called on the Government to “work with the United States to try to prevent a full-

⁵⁶ Business and Trade Committee, [Oral evidence: UK arms exports to Israel](#) [PDF], 24 April 2024, HC 690

⁵⁷ Business and Trade Committee, [UK arms exports to Israel – oral evidence](#), 21 May 2024

⁵⁸ [HC Deb 30 November 2023 c1049](#)

⁵⁹ [HC Deb 12 December 2023 c247WH](#)

⁶⁰ [HC Deb 12 December 2023 c266WH](#)

⁶¹ [HC Deb 12 December 2023 c269](#)

⁶² [HC Deb 7 May 2024 c444](#); [HC Deb 26 March 2024 c1395](#)

scale Rafah offensive, by being clear that they will assess UK exports and, if it goes ahead, join our American allies in suspending weapons or components that could be used in that offensive”.⁶³

Lyn Brown, the Shadow Minister for Africa, has suggested a Labour Government “would reform the [arms export] system so that it is transparent and committed to upholding international law”.⁶⁴

Ed Davey, the leader of the Liberal Democratic party, has called for the UK to suspend arms exports to Israel.⁶⁵

MPs have tabled and signed a number of Early Day Motions relating to Israel and Gaza. These are available on Parliament’s website: [Early Day Motions](#).

4.3 Private Member’s Bill

Zarah Sultana (Lab) led a debate on arms exports to Israel on 12 December 2023 (see above).

She has also tabled a Private Members Bill, the [Arms Trade \(Inquiry and Suspension\) Bill](#), calling for an independent inquiry into the end use of arms sold to foreign states to determine whether they have been used in violation of international law. The Bill would require the Business and Trade Secretary to immediately suspend the sale of arms to foreign states where it cannot be demonstrated that arms sold will not be used in violation of international law.⁶⁶

[Second reading is scheduled for 7 June 2024.](#)

⁶³ [HC Deb 20 May 2024 c647](#)

⁶⁴ [HC DEB 24 January 2024 c156WH](#)

⁶⁵ Liberal Democrats, [Aid worker deaths: Davey calls on government to suspend arms sales to Israel](#), 3 April 2024

⁶⁶ [HC Deb 12 December 2023 c242WH](#)

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