

UK foreign policy

Benjamin Netanyahu attacks UK decision on arms to Israel as 'shameful'

Criticism from Israeli prime minister follows decision to block about 30 licences for items including military aircraft parts



'This shameful decision will not change Israel's determination to defeat Hamas,' Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday © OHAD ZWIGENBERG/POOL/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

By **Lucy Fisher, Maxine Kelly** and **Andrew England** in London AN HOUR AGO

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has attacked the UK's decision to suspend some export licences to the country used for arms in military operations in Gaza as "shameful".

The criticism came after Britain blocked about 30 licences for a range of items including components in military aircraft on Monday, though it insisted the move would not hit Israeli security.

The UK announcement followed a government review that found possible breaches of international humanitarian law by [Israel](#) in its offensive against Hamas in the strip.

"Days after Hamas executed six Israeli hostages, the UK government suspended thirty arms licenses to Israel," Netanyahu wrote on X on Tuesday.

"This shameful decision will not change Israel's determination to defeat Hamas, a genocidal terrorist organization that savagely murdered 1200 people on October 7, including 14 British citizens," he added.

John Healey, UK defence secretary, said on Tuesday that the UK move would not "have a material impact on Israel's security" and that Britain remained "a staunch ally" of Israel.

“This is not about making a political gesture, this is about following the rule of law,” he told the BBC, adding that the conflict in [Gaza](#) “requires the government to review the licences which may be involved”.

Britain is the first major western ally of Israel to partially suspend arms sales to the country since the start of the war.

The Labour government said on Monday it had concluded there was a clear risk of some items exported to Israel being used in serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Although the UK is not a big exporter of arms to Israel compared with the US or Germany, with British arms accounting for only about 1 per cent of Israeli imports, the decision has already had diplomatic repercussions.

Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant said on Monday that he was “deeply disheartened to learn of the sanctions placed by the UK government on export licences to Israel’s defence establishment”.

The UK’s chief rabbi, Sir Ephraim Mirvis, wrote on X: “It beggars belief that the British government, a close strategic ally of Israel, has announced a partial suspension of arms licences, at a time when Israel is fighting a war for its very survival on seven fronts.”

He added that the decision by David Lammy, UK foreign secretary, “feeds the falsehood that Israel is in breach of international humanitarian law, when in fact it is going to extraordinary lengths to uphold it”.

Former prime minister Boris Johnson emphasised that Hamas was still holding Israeli hostages. “Why are Lammy and [UK Prime Minister Sir Keir] Starmer abandoning Israel?” he posted on X. “Do they want Hamas to win?”

But human rights groups and aid agencies argue London should have gone further and included components for Israel’s F-35 war planes, which have been bombing the besieged Gaza Strip.

There are about 350 UK arms export licences to Israel currently granted. Britain’s suspension of about 30 of these will be kept under review, while any new licence applications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Human Rights Watch said the suspension “took far too long and didn’t go far

enough”, labelling the F-35 “a workhorse of Israel’s brutal bombing campaign” and the UK’s decision to exempt components for it “a miscomprehension of the law or a wilful disregard”.

Hannah Bond, co-chief executive of ActionAid UK, added: “The UK remains at risk of being complicit in the atrocities taking place in Gaza daily” as long as it does not “halt all new and existing arms licenses to the Israeli government”.

Israel launched its offensive against Hamas in Gaza after the Palestinian militant group’s October 7 attack killed 1,200 people and led to another 250 being taken hostage, according to Israeli officials.

Israel’s assault in Gaza has killed more than 40,000 people, according to Palestinian officials, and led to UN warnings about the risk of famine and widespread disease in the besieged strip.

While supporting Israel’s right to defence, the UK and other nations have repeatedly criticised it for the limited flow of humanitarian aid into the strip, while also expressing concern about the civilian death toll and the displacement of about 1.9mn of Gaza’s 2.3mn population.

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