

Israel-Hamas war

Germany suspends arms exports to Israel in 'rupture' over Gaza

Berlin's move follows growing debate over nation's unwavering support for Israel



Smoke rises from a damaged building following an Israeli strike in Gaza City on Friday © Bashar Taleb/AFP/Getty Images

Anne-Sylvaine Chassany in Berlin

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Germany has suspended arms deliveries to Israel for planning a fresh offensive in Gaza, a historic break from its unwavering postwar solidarity with the nation.

Berlin's decision is a response to Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to [expand military operations](#) that could result in a full reoccupation of the enclave, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said in a statement on Friday.

Merz argued that the "even tougher military action" decided by the Israeli cabinet made it increasingly difficult to achieve a ceasefire with Hamas and release the hostages held by the militant group.

Berlin will stop authorising exports until further notice of any military equipment that Israel could use in [Gaza](#), but will continue shipping weapons used to fight Iran. Germany is one of the world's top five arms exporters and Israel accounts for about 11 per cent of its military exports, according to the Stockholm International Peace

Research Institute.

“The German government remains deeply concerned about the ongoing suffering of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip,” Merz said. “With the planned offensive, the Israeli government bears even greater responsibility than before for providing them with supplies.”

Berlin’s decision to suspend arms supplies follows weeks of acrimonious debate between Merz’s Christian Democrats and his coalition partners the Social Democrats in the face of what the UN has called an unfolding famine in Gaza.

It is the first punitive measure taken by the German government against Israel for its action in Gaza, a dramatic departure from Berlin’s staunch support for Israel, which is rooted in the legacy of the Holocaust.

“This is the biggest rupture in the relationship between Germany and Israel since the start of the relationship in the 1950s,” said Thorsten Benner, director of the Global Public Policy Institute in Berlin. “For a CDU chancellor, this partial weapons export suspension is a monumental step — and one that all members of the German government would have rather avoided.”

The decision on Friday to halt arms deliveries could sour relations between Berlin and Israel, which also supplies Germany with weapon systems, such as the Arrow 3.

“There is a risk that Israel retaliates,” Benner said.

Netanyahu on Friday expressed his “disappointment” with Merz. “Instead of supporting Israel’s just war against Hamas, which carried out the most horrific attack against the Jewish people since the Holocaust, Germany is rewarding Hamas terrorism by embargoing arms to Israel,” the Israeli prime minister’s office said.

European Council president António Costa said Israel’s decision to take over Gaza City “must have consequences for EU-Israel relations”.

Costa said that the move “not only violates” an agreement between Israel and the EU

“but also undermines fundamental principles of international law and universal values”.

The EU [struck a deal](#) with Israel for a “substantial increase” in aid deliveries to Gaza last month.

Merz has long been a strong defender of Israel in the tradition of postwar CDU chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who negotiated reparations with Israel and defined Germany’s moral commitment to stand by the country.

After winning general elections in February, Merz told Netanyahu that he would be invited to visit Germany despite an outstanding arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court for war crimes in Gaza.

But as the humanitarian situation in Gaza has further deteriorated, Merz has toughened his stance, [saying in May](#) that Israel’s actions in Gaza could no longer be justified as only fighting Hamas terrorism.

In June, foreign minister Johann Wadephul suggested there could be a review of German arms deliveries to Israel, which have totalled close to €500mn since Hamas’s October 7 2023 attack on Israel — causing uproar within the CDU party.

Merz seemed to backtrack when Netanyahu bombed Iranian nuclear facilities, saluting Israel for “doing the west’s dirty work”. In Brussels, Germany has also resisted EU efforts to impose sanctions on the Israeli government over Gaza.

But with daily news of starvation and killings of Palestinian civilians, the 69-year-old chancellor has faced growing calls from the opposition Green and Left parties to change course. Public surveys show that a majority of Germans have grown critical of Israel.

Moves by France, the UK and Canada to recognise a Palestinian state have added pressure on Berlin. Germany supports a two-state solution but has said recognition of a Palestinian state should come only at the end of a peace process.

Additional reporting by Laura Dubois in Brussels and Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv

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Anne-Sylvaine Chassany