

The Role of the British Military in Israel's Gaza Genocide

The British Armed Forces have been, since October 2023, providing military assistance to Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operations in Gaza. British facilities, aircraft, and personnel have been operative in support of Israel's military in Palestine, Lebanon, the Red Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean. Though information is scarce, existing reports would suggest that acts by the British government and military render the UK complicit in acts amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

Spy planes

Dedicated Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions officially commenced on the 3rd December 2023. Since then, hundreds of British RAF 'spy plane' ISR missions have operated over the skies of Gaza, providing intelligence to Israel. The government claims that flights have been "*tasked solely to locate hostages*", and that "*only information relating to hostage rescue will be passed on to the relevant authorities*".¹ The model of plane used, the Shadow R1, is operated by the RAF's No.14 Squadron. Utilising "*high definition electro-optical and electronic sensors*,"² it is described as an "*intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) aircraft*."³

The UK has conducted at least 645 surveillance missions over Gaza since October 2023, accounting for 47% of the total number of surveillance flights (of the rest, 33% by the United States, 20% by Israel), says Al Jazeera.⁴ The government has not clarified how it controls Israel's use of the information it provides. Likewise, the government has not clarified what due diligence processes it has undertaken to ensure that it has not, knowingly or unknowingly, participated in acts contrary to international law, despite spy planes reported presence in Gaza's skies during documented atrocities.

According to the Times, the UK's Shadow R1 aircraft was said to be operating above Gaza when a series of airstrikes against a World Central Kitchen humanitarian convoy killed seven aid workers,⁵ three British nationals among them. British spy planes were also reportedly operational during the 8th June Nuseirat Camp Massacre, an Israeli operation which killed at least 274 Palestinians and injured 700.⁶ Four Israeli hostages were retrieved during this massacre, leaving the role of Royal Air Force (RAF) aircraft unclear. Israeli military sources told the New York Times, immediately following the 8th of June raid, that US and UK spy planes have "*been able to provide information that Israel's drones do not collect*."⁷

The government has stated that "*we only provide intelligence to our allies where we are satisfied that it will be used in accordance with International Humanitarian Law*".⁸ However, it is impossible to verify this claim without transparency regarding the nature of data collected and shared, and on assurances sought from Israel by the UK as to how this data may be used. If the UK is sharing information that assists in the commission of war crimes or crimes against humanity, this would amount to British complicity actionable under Article 25 of the Rome Statute. The government has confirmed that, if requested by the International Criminal Court (ICC), the information collected through ISR missions would be provided to assist the ICC's ongoing investigation into war crimes committed by Israel. However, it must be offered unilaterally.⁹

Reportedly also assisting in "*hostage rescue*" efforts are troops of Britain's Special Air Service (SAS). In October 2023, it was reported that "*UK special forces are believed to be working with counterparts including Israel's elite*

¹ UK Ministry of Defence, 2nd December 2023, [Press release: UK military activity in the Eastern Mediterranean](#)

² Royal Air Force, [Shadow R1](#)

³ Airforce Technology (19th July 2018), [Shadow R1 ISTAR Aircraft](#)

⁴ Al Jazeera (23rd October 2024), [What impact has US, UK military assistance had on Israel's war ambitions?](#)

⁵ Bellingcat (2nd April 2024), [Strike That Killed World Central Kitchen Workers Bears Hallmarks of Israeli Precision Strike](#)

⁶ Associated Press (9th June 2024), [Gaza's Health Ministry says 274 Palestinians were killed in Israeli raid that rescued 4 hostages](#)

⁷ The New York Times (9th June 2024), [The Other War: How Israel Scours Gaza for Clues About the Hostages](#)

⁸ Kennard, M., Declassified UK (3rd October 2024), [Keir Starmer's 100 spy flights over Gaza in support of Israel](#)

⁹ Brown, L. The Times (25th October 2024), [RAF's Gaza photos could be used against Israel in war crimes court](#)

Sayeret Matkal force and the US Delta Force to collect intelligence that could lead to hostage rescue attempts”,¹⁰ with information on the SAS detachment reported on only briefly before the apparent implementation of a UK Military “D-Notice”, seeking to prevent the publication of information deemed to pose a risk to national security.¹¹

Facilitating Arms Transfers & Military Operations

It was reported that between October to November 2023, over 30 UK military transport flights, transferring arms to Israel, took place from RAF Akrotiri airbase in Cyprus.¹² In addition to UK munitions, RAF Akrotiri has been used by the US in transferring arms to Israel. As reported by Haaretz, these transfers have included US and UK transport aircrafts, carrying “*equipment, arms and forces*”.¹³ Military assistance through the RAF base has continued unabated with the incumbent government: since Keir Starmer took office as Prime Minister in July 2024, US special forces flights to Israel, which were nearly all unmarked, doubled.¹⁴ Operating in parallel, the government has confirmed that, between 4th July and 7th October 2024, eight RAF-operated aircraft have flown to Israel, double the figure for the two months prior to Starmer’s election,¹⁵ the purpose of these flights are unknown.

The UK government have made three assurances and commitments regarding the use of RAF bases and flights. **Firstly**, the government asserted that no “*lethal arms*” have been transported to Israel via RAF flights.¹⁶ However, this is difficult to reconcile with the Haaretz report stating that RAF Akrotiri was used to transfer US and UK arms to Israel. **Secondly**, allegedly “*only defensive material, or material that might help with the recovery of hostages*”¹⁷ has been provided to Israel through RAF Akrotiri. However, no information has been released regarding the nature of the “*defensive*” military equipment provided to Israel via the RAF base. This framing of “*defensive material*” is concerning as, since October 2023, Israel has undoubtedly committed a plethora of international crimes under the guise of a “*defensive war*”.¹⁸ **Thirdly**, the government committed that: “*all parties’ use of UK bases must be in line with international law obligations*.”¹⁹ However, the reported claims of arms transfers occurring via UK bases, which may be utilised by Israel in the commission of international crimes, would cast doubt on the UK’s ability to uphold this commitment.

Israeli presence at MOD facilities

There has been a worrying lack of transparency regarding Israeli Air Force operated planes that have taken off and landed from British territory since October. It was reported from October 2023 to February 2024, nine Israeli military planes visited the UK.²⁰ In February 2024, the then Defence Minister James Heappey confirmed in Parliament that “*there are currently six Israeli Armed Forces officers posted in the UK*”, and are participants in “*UK defence-led training courses*.”²¹ However, due to the troubling opacity, the full extent and nature of the collaborative relationship between Israeli and British armed forces is unknown.

¹⁰ Parsley, D., Milano, C. (18th October 2024), The Independent, [SAS ready to assist Israel’s elite forces in any rescue attempt of UK hostages](#)

¹¹ Kennard, M., (29th May 2024), Declassified UK, [60 British war planes have landed in Israel since Gaza bombing began](#)

¹² Action on Armed Violence, (28th November 2023) ‘[UK Government suppresses MP inquiries about Cyprus base’s role in Gaza conflict](#)’; Wilks, A., Al Jazeera (15th January 2024), [UK’s alleged use of Cyprus bases to arm Israel and hit Yemen draw protests](#). See also: Menon, C., Morning Star (23rd October 2024), [British bases in Cyprus aid the Israeli war effort against the people’s will](#)

¹³ Haaretz (31st October 2023), [OSINT Shows Third U.S. Naval Group Arrives in Mideast, Countries Prep to Evacuate Thousands](#)

¹⁴ Declassified UK (10th October 2024), [U.S. special ops flights to Israel from UK’s Cyprus base surge under Starmer](#), See also: Action on Armed Violence (10th October 2024), [Cyprus, Israel, and the covert war: Is Britain complicit in Gaza’s bloodshed?](#)

¹⁵ UK Parliament Hansard, Question for Ministry of Defence, [UIN 5837](#) and [UIN 5838](#), both tabled on 4 October 2024

¹⁶ Cyprus Mail (13th December 2023), ‘[No lethal cargo’ sent to Israel from British bases](#)

¹⁷ Al Jazeera (15th January 2024), [UK’s alleged use of Cyprus bases to arm Israel and hit Yemen draw protests](#)

¹⁸ The Guardian (1st October 2024), [How Netanyahu weathered the storm in the year since Hamas attacked](#)

¹⁹ UK Parliament Hansard, Question for Ministry of Defence, [UIN 5076](#), tabled on 4 December 2023

²⁰ Declassified UK (8th February 2024), [UK admits nine Israeli military planes have visited Britain since Gaza bombing began](#)

²¹ UK Parliament Hansard, Question for Ministry of Defence, [UIN 12736](#), tabled on 1 February 2024