

BDS MOVEMENT | UCL

UCL, Airbus & Complicity in Israeli Apartheid, Occupation & Genocide

Airbus Group is a trans-European multinational aerospace corporation. It is one of the 15 largest arms companies in the world, despite primarily specializing in the design and manufacturing of commercial aircraft. Its Defence and Space sector specialises in military aircraft, space systems, connected intelligence, and unmanned aerial systems – which have been put to work in European border surveillance systems (see reports [here](#) and [here](#)) and in [Saudi Arabia's attacks on Yemen](#). Airbus operates beyond Europe, with 41 foreign facilities operating across [24 countries worldwide](#). [Airbus' foreign facilities](#) predominantly relate to the provision of maintenance, repair, and overhaul services, as well as research facilities, while much of its military manufacturing takes place in its headquarters.

European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS) holds an 80% share in Airbus. EADS is a major European aerospace company specialising in commercial and military aircraft, space systems, missiles, and other defence systems. BAE Systems, whose history is intimately tied with Airbus, [reportedly holds a 20 percent share](#).

Airbus and complicity in the Apartheid, Occupation & Genocide of Palestine

Airbus has collaborated extensively with Israeli Aerospace Industries (IAI) and between 2008 and 2021 applied for a UK export [license to sell weapons to Israel](#).¹ IAI and Airbus also have historically collaborated in [joint commercial ventures](#). In 2011, Airbus Military and IAI came together to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to develop and market the [C295 platform](#) (a combat aircraft with surveillance systems). In 2018, Airbus signed a \$600million deal with IAI to lease [Heron TP drones](#) to Germany's Defence Ministry. These are unmanned drones which [have been used in Gaza](#) since October 2023, and have been reportedly deployed by German forces [in Afghanistan](#) for 'a number of years'. Recent reports, from May 2024, note that the aircraft system was customised for the 'unique requirements of the German Ministry of Defence' by IAI, Airbus, and Israel's Ministry of Defence Directorate of Defence R&D, with President and CEO of IAI, Mr Boaz Levy, [stating that](#):

"The deployment of Heron TP... signifies a milestone achievement for Israel Aerospace Industries, reinforcing its position as a leading provider of cutting-edge aerospace and defence solutions on the global stage. This collaboration sets the stage for continued innovation and collaboration..."²

Airbus Defence and Space Airborne Solutions, a 100% subsidiary of Airbus, also partners with IAI to operate maritime aerial surveillance services for the European Border Agency. These drones, previously tested in operations conducted by the Israeli armed forces, are used to intercept migrant vessels crossing the Mediterranean. According to Statewatch, the choice of these drones was determined by their ["performance... in the maintenance of public order by the Israeli Defence Forces and police forces"](#), implicating them in the ongoing enforcement of Israel's system of colonial occupation and apartheid. Airbus has thus not only

¹ The number of these license applications is not known since 2021.

² <https://www.airbus.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2024-05-the-heron-tp-rpas-produced-by-uav-peo-at-the-directorate-of-defense>

profited from – and helped Israel to profit from – the sale of weapons tested on Palestinians, but the company has also [enabled Israel to establish itself as a leading provider of defence and commercial technologies](#) on the global stage.

It has recently been reported that technologies developed with [financial support from Europe](#) are being used in the current war in Gaza.

In recent decades, Israel has reportedly been granted “privileged access” to funds associated with the [Europe Commission’s Horizon research programme](#), under which arms companies have benefitted from numerous projects whose ‘civilian’ classified research areas were named to include foci such as border protection, disaster control and maritime surveillance. [In an open letter](#), just under 300 academics have subsequently called for an end to EU funding for research projects which could contribute to violations of international law or human rights, with special mention of projects involving Israeli arms companies Elbit and IAI, who have benefitted historically. One such project involving Airbus was the [‘OPARUS’ project](#) in UAV-based aerial surveillance.

Airbus has been the target of BDS-related campaigning, both previous and current. This includes a current [divestment campaign at Brown University](#) which targets Airbus alongside 10 other companies; the 2014 [occupation of Airbus headquarters](#) by London Palestine Action groups for its reported complicity in civilian attacks which killed over 2,100 Palestinians; and [workers refusing to transport weapons to Israel](#) at an Airbus factory in Spain last year.

Public universities remain a vital resource for arms corporations to source new ideas and employees, and in turn to influence research agendas. Arms corporations are very open about these incentives, openly seeking to influence not only the private sector [but also government and academia](#). For example, Thales [claim](#) that they will “do whatever it takes” to build ever closer relationships with British universities for these very reasons, while Airbus are equally open about their own [“strategic partnerships”](#) and [“campus engagement strategies”](#) for “gaining access to world class capabilities” and for appealing to as many students as possible. Through this, not only does [Airbus seek to “encourage”](#) young people (even as young as school-aged children) to enter the industry, but also seek to help universities “refine their academic courses” by [helping to shape curriculums](#). “Developing a talent pipeline”, as they call it, is [“vital to their success”](#)!

UCL and Airbus in Research Partnerships

UCL has several long-standing research partnerships with Airbus, and is the Lead Research Organisation in the following ongoing projects:

- A £13,972,530 UKRI funded digital technologies project: [‘PETRAS 2 Secure Digital Technologies’](#) which lists Intel (United States) as collaborators, alongside multiple complicit arms manufacturing companies Thales, Airbus, Raytheon, QinetiQ, as well as commercial companies currently being targeted by BDS campaigns, Cisco and Barclays. Stated as being driven by ‘sectoral cybersecurity priorities’, the project aims to (i) provide strategic advice and policy insight to both public and private sector in dealing with challenges posed by data and AI (Artificial Intelligence); (ii) to ‘functionally improve the capacity of government to rise to the challenge of the ‘arms race’ to meet growing need for cybersecurity expertise in government & industry; and (iii) to increase early adoption of new technologies by industry and government partners.
- A [EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training scheme in Electronic and Electrical Engineering](#) project, partnered with Airbus, BAE Systems and Leonardo (and Defence Science & Technology Lab) and including ‘Aerospace, Defence and Marine’ as an Industrial Sector Classification.
- A UKRI funded ‘Robodome imaging for high performance manufactured aerostructures’ [project](#) in aerodynamic wing surfaces (aircraft manufacture) for next generation energy-efficient aircraft for Airbus. The project overview notes that ‘for current products metrology activities in aircraft wing manufacture... consume over 25% of Airbus production time’ - this research is specifically for

improvement in productivity and flexibility in manufacturing for Airbus. Application could be for military or civilian aircraft.

- The ['QUantum Dot On Silicon systems for communications, information processing and sensing \(QUDOS\)'](#) in silicon communications technology. Partners include both Airbus and Leonardo. Classification sectors include Aerospace, Defence and Marine, Digital Communications/IT. Within industry, research on silicon photonics holds the following potential applications: enhancement of military communications systems, use of silicon-based lasers in directed energy weapons, surveillance, avionics, satellite communications including military applications, LIDAR aerospace applications (autonomous flight and terrain mapping), and cybersecurity applications.
- The EPSRC funded ['Centre for Doctoral Training in Connected Electronic and Photonic Systems'](#) alongside Airbus, Defence Science & Tech lab, Leonardo UK, Thales, and BAE Systems. Includes potential military/aerospace/defence applications, such as: secure communication in military operations, the enhancement of radar and LIDAR systems for targeting, navigation and reconnaissance; applications in electronic warfare; 'enhancing capabilities to detect, analyse, and counteract electronic threats' and for countermeasure devices to disrupt enemy communications and radar; avionics, navigation, surveillance and targeting capabilities in aircraft; autonomous systems including Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), autonomous navigation in drones and other autonomous vehicles, amongst others.
- The UKRI ['Towards Zero Carbon Aviation \(TOZCA\)'](#), located in the Bartlett School of Environment, Energy & Resources. Project partners include Airbus, Rolls-Royce, and Shell.
- The European Commissioned ['Graphene Flagship 2D Experimental Pilot Line'](#) (2D-EPL) project involves UCL in partnership with Airbus, alongside multiple Airbus subsidiaries (Airbus Helicopters/Airbus Defence and Space GMBH/Airbus Operations SL and Airbus Operations GMBH); Technion Israel Institute of Technology, and another Israeli based technology company Mellanox Technologies Ltd. Started in 2020, the project is set to finish in September 2024, but is just the latest in a series of European Commission projects on graphene-based technology. The 2D-EPL project holds significant potential for military and defence applications due to certain properties of graphene and related 2D materials. The development and integration of these materials into semiconductor manufacturing can lead to advanced electronic and photonic devices with smaller sizes, higher performance, and extended functionalities compared to current silicon-based technologies. These advancements can be utilized in various military applications, including enhanced sensor systems for surveillance and reconnaissance, more efficient communication devices, and improved signal processing capabilities. Additionally, the lightweight and robust nature of graphene-based materials could reportedly contribute to the development of advanced protective gear and more resilient electronic components for use in harsh environments. The project's focus on establishing a comprehensive European ecosystem for prototype production ensures that these innovations can be rapidly adopted and scaled by defence industries.

UCL and Airbus

As well as ongoing research partnerships, Airbus funds research training at UCL:

- Airbus is listed as a recent research funder for the Mechanical Engineering [MPhil/PhD](#) at UCL
- UCL's [Department for Space and Climate Physics](#) list Airbus under their 'Training and Strategic Partnerships', stating that "staff at Mullard Space Science Laboratory work strategically with organisations to develop innovative technologies and increase capability". These are described as 'mutually beneficial partnerships'
- Additionally, it should be noted that [EPSRC studentships](#) have also been awarded to UCL students in partnership with Airbus.

The presence of key individuals from Airbus on UCL's advisory boards is also problematic for this reason.

Multiple Airbus employees hold significant positions at UCL, including:

- Victor Chu, Board Member at Airbus, who has been [Chair](#) of UCL Council since 2019
- Ralph Green, Research & Development Manager of Communications at Airbus Defence and Space Limited, who sits on UCL's Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering's [Industrial Advisory Board](#)
- Paul Bianco, Airbus Defence and Space Project Manager, was also reported to sit on [UCL's Centre for Systems Engineering Advisory Board](#), but the centre [no longer lists its board members publicly](#), so it is not possible to verify whether this is still the case.