

BDS MOVEMENT | UCL

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

BAE & Complicity in Israeli Apartheid, Occupation & Genocide

British company BAE Systems plc is the seventh-largest weapons manufacturer in the world, with a reported 96% of its revenue from defence.¹ It is by far the most significant defence supplier in the UK (14% of total MOD annual spend in 2021/22), a position enjoyed for over a decade.² BAE Systems does not shy away from doing business with countries engaged in listed Human Rights abuses and/or scoring high levels of corruption and have been involved in several controversies related to war crimes and human rights violations.³ These include the sale of £15 billion worth of arms and services to Saudi Arabia's military between 2015 and 2019 during Yemen's civil war, where Saudi-led coalition forces were accused of bombing schools, hospitals and civilians.⁴ 54 UK arms export licences for the sale of military goods to Egypt were granted to BAE between 2008 and 2021 despite well-documented human rights abuses by the government in power.⁵ BAE Systems also proceeded with the sale of the Mk3 naval gun system to the Indonesian Navy despite the Indonesian military and police being party to gross human rights violations in the Papua and West Papua provinces.⁶

BAE Systems is heavily involved in the current decimation of Gaza, with UK facilities producing the M109 howitzer, a 155mm mobile artillery system which fires "tens of thousands of shells into the Gaza strip."⁷ This includes white phosphorus gas shells used in Gaza and Lebanon, as documented by Human Rights Watch. Exposure can cause catastrophic burns and life-changing injuries: firing these shells into densely populated civilian areas can constitute a war crime.⁸ BAE Systems also produces components for missile launches from F-15, F-16 and F-35 fighter jets, which are used extensively in attacks on Gaza, and most recently in the 2023-2024 assaults.⁹ BAE is the largest company in a UK programme (in partnership with Lockheed Martin), producing 15% of each F-35 - "the most lethal...fighter jet in the world" - a contract with an estimated value of

¹ <https://people.defensenews.com/top-100/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/mod-trade-industry-and-contracts-2022/mod-trade-industry-and-contracts-2022>

³ <https://aoav.org.uk/2024/how-bae-systems-helped-arm-half-the-world-key-findings/>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/dec/11/bae-systems-accused-of-being-party-to-alleged-war-crimes>, <https://aoav.org.uk/2024/bae-systems-and-human-rights-a-troubling-relationship-examined/>

⁵ <https://aoav.org.uk/2024/bae-systems-and-human-rights-a-troubling-relationship-examined/>

⁶ <https://aoav.org.uk/2024/bae-systems-and-human-rights-a-troubling-relationship-examined/>

⁷ <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/defense-news/article-774833>, <https://afsc.org/gaza-genocide-companies>, <https://corporatewatch.org/whos-arming-israel-how-bae-fuels-genocide-in-gaza/>

⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/12/questions-and-answers-israels-use-white-phosphorus-gaza-and-lebanon>, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/lebanon-evidence-of-israels-unlawful-use-of-white-phosphorus-in-southern-lebanon-as-cross-border-hostilities-escalate/>

⁹ <https://afsc.org/gaza-genocide-companies>

£368m since 2016.¹⁰ Israel's own Ministry of Defence has confirmed F-35 jets were used to deploy 2000 lb "mega bombs" in its July 13th bombing of the densely populated Al Mawasi "safe zone" in Gaza, killing an estimated 90 civilians and injuring 300.¹¹ Despite their confirmed use in this attack, which almost certainly violated international humanitarian law, the export of F-35 parts was controversially unaffected by the recent suspension of 30 out of 350 UK arms export licences to Israel over concerns about their use to commit possible war crimes.¹²

BAE Systems profits directly from the genocide in Gaza. The company enjoyed record operating profits of £2.7bn in 2023 and a surge in share price,¹³ seeing a 24% increase in 6 months as of April 2024, fuelled by the genocide in Gaza. BAE Systems CEO Charles Woodburn personally benefited from a £1m boost in the sale price of his company shares following October 7th, bringing him a profit of £4,163,035.¹⁴

UCL & BAE

BAE Systems benefits from a deep, ongoing research relationship with UCL's engineering departments and centres. Indeed, the UCL Systems Engineering Department (UCLse) and Mullard Space Science Laboratory (MSSL) were founded in collaboration with BAE Systems (formerly GEC Marconi) specifically to share skills and knowledge developed "from over two hundred successful rocket and space missions... with systems engineers in other sectors."¹⁵ BAE is listed on the Mechanical Engineering Department's webpage as a funder, alongside other companies that produce military equipment.¹⁶ UCLse currently collaborates with BAE on the "Hybrid Electric Technology for Transit Buses" research project funded by the Government's Technology and Strategy Board and the Department of Transport.¹⁷ As recently as 2023, UCL joined as a major partner in the telecommunications project "Tudor," which includes BAE Systems as a consortium partner.¹⁸ BAE Systems' collaborations with Sensors Systems and Circuits¹⁹ and Electronic Materials and Devices²⁰ are also listed on UCL department pages.

In recent years, BAE has also partnered with UCL on PhD and MPhil studentships (CDTs) in collaboration with arms companies such as Leonardo, supported and funded by UKRI research councils.²¹ Notably, in July 2024,

¹⁰ <https://caat.org.uk/data/countries/israel/mapped-all-the-uk-companies-manufacturing-components-for-israels-f35-combat-aircraft/>, https://caat.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/04/Briefing_-_UK-Arms-Export-Licences-to-Israel-April-2024-FINAL.pdf, <https://www.baesystems.com/en/product/f-35-lightning-ii>

¹¹ https://www.information.dk/indland/2024/09/danskudstyrede-kampfly-deltog-angreb-gaza-store-civile-tab?check_logged_in=1&kupon=eyJpYXQiOiE3MjUyNTUwMjEsInN1Yil6IjQ3Mjg3Njo4MjM1NzYifQ.7k2QM_MAdcaUS-pePhgxtQ

¹² <https://caat.org.uk/news/investigation-reveals-israel-used-partly-uk-made-f-35-in-attack-on-gaza-humanitarian-zone-in-july-killing-90/>, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-suspends-around-30-arms-export-licences-to-israel-for-use-in-gaza-over-international-humanitarian-law-concerns#:~:text=These%20assessments%20have%20led%20to,certain%20exports%20immediately%20from%20today>, <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/uk-confirms-f-35-unaffected-by-israel-export-ban/>

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/feb/21/bae-systems-profit-ukraine-israel-gaza-wars-ftse-100>

¹⁴ <https://aoav.org.uk/2024/bae-systems-ceo-made-almost-1m-extra-in-share-sale-after-hike-in-price-since-gaza-war/>

¹⁵ https://www.ppi-int.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/PPI_SyEN_76-1.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/mechanical-engineering/about/funders-and-partners>

¹⁷ <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=400028>, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/mssl/space-engineering/technology-and-project-management/full-list-current-projects-and-roles>

¹⁸ https://ugc.production.linktr.ee/bf4fd37b-9cff-4dcc-bbe8-c425799b0c00_University-Complicity-Report--1--update.pdf, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/iccs/news/2023/jan/ucl-eee-academics-join-ps12m-project-improve-energy-efficiency-uk-telecommunications>

¹⁹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/electronic-electrical-engineering/research/sensors-systems-and-circuits>

²⁰ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/electronic-electrical-engineering/research/electronic-materials-and-devices>

²¹ <https://www.ceps-cdt.org/partners>, <https://gow.epsrc.ukri.org/NGBOViewGrant.aspx?GrantRef=EP/S022139/1>

UKRI awarded the UCL Department of Security and Crime Science a £ 7,996,863 million grant to host a CDT in “cyber-physical risk” in partnership with BAE Systems and Amazon, amongst other security, technology and defence partners.²² Given BAE’s almost exclusive defence focus, 96% of its revenue,²³ it is *highly likely* that research conducted at UCL in partnership with BAE has had, and continues to have, military applications; therefore, a full and transparent audit of all UCL research ties with BAE is urgently needed.

BAE relies on a “pipeline of STEM talent” from UK universities to maintain its leading position.²⁴ BAE offers internships, funds bursaries, and collaborations on MSc programmes, some of which feature current and ex-BAE employees as UCL academic staff.²⁵ For example, BAE Systems lists the MSc Mechanical Engineering and MSc Systems Engineering Management as eligible for a full BAE Systems bursary.²⁶ BAE actively recruits graduates through informal introductions and frequent career events. UCL boasts of BAE as a frequent employer on various course pages.²⁷ During the 2023/2024 Academic Year, BAE Systems recruited student brand ambassador roles across UK universities to promote BAE Systems.²⁸

BAE employees hold key positions of influence at UCL: Alan Harding²⁹ (Head of Information Systems Engineering at BAE and BAE Systems Global Engineering Fellow) and Mike Wilkinson (Chief Technologist at BAE Systems Maritime) were listed as sitting on UCL’s Centre of Systems Engineering (UCLse) Industrial Advisory Board³⁰ up until the end of the academic year 2023-24. More alarmingly, Joanna Talbot (Chief Counsel of Compliance and Regulations at BAE Systems) sits on the Centre for Ethics and Law advisory board.³¹ The same centre reportedly received nearly £50,000 in sponsorship from BAE systems.³² Though this financial relationship officially ended in 2001, Talbot’s continuing presence raises serious questions about the impartiality and motives of the centre.

Given BAE Systems’ documented role in arming regimes that commit war crimes and human rights abuses, including the ongoing and illegal occupation, apartheid and genocide in Palestine:

- Why does UCL continue to support research and strategic partnerships with this company, particularly where research may facilitate such atrocities?
- What does the continuing presence of BAE figures in prominent advisory positions and a proud willingness to enrich BAE’s recruitment say about the values of our institution?

²² <https://gow.epsrc.ukri.org/NGBOViewGrant.aspx?GrantRef=EP/Y035410/1>, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/mar/ucl-receives-ps54m-boost-doctoral-training-engineering-and-physical-sciences>

²³ <https://people.defensenews.com/top-100/>

²⁴ <https://x.com/BAESystemsplc/status/1772878779280392491>

²⁵ <https://profiles.ucl.ac.uk/38302-ian-raper/about>

²⁶ <https://www.baesystems.com/en-uk/our-company/our-businesses/military-air-and-information/launch-a-career-in-aerospace-engineering/msc-programmes>,

²⁷ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/taught-degrees/power-systems-engineering-msc>, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/taught-degrees/technology-management-msc>, <https://cheesegratermagazine.org/2024/04/08/the-jeremy-bentham-room-occupation-highlighting-ucls-role-in-the-suppression-of-the-people/>

²⁸ https://ugc.production.linktr.ee/bf4fd37b-9cff-4dcc-bbe8-c425799b0c00_University-Complicity-Report--1--update.pdf, <https://www.instagram.com/oncampuspromotions/p/CwQlabwseEN/?next=%2Fcamihoms%2F&hl=es-la>

²⁹ Now retired.

³⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20240428094250/https://www.ucl.ac.uk/systems-engineering/people/industrial-advisory-board>

³¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ethics-law/people>, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ethics-law/sites/ethics_law/files/ce_l_ar_2022-23_web_version.pdf

³² <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/universities-millions-defence-companies-israel-gaza/>