

BDS MOVEMENT | UCL

UCL, Rolls-Royce & Complicity in Israeli Apartheid, Occupation & Genocide

Company Profile

Rolls-Royce Holdings plc is a British multinational aerospace and defence company. It is the world's 25th largest weapons manufacturer, and was the U.K.'s second largest arms company after BAE Systems as of 2022.¹ Rolls-Royce produces engines for military aircraft and naval craft, power systems for military vehicles and is involved in the development of nuclear submarine cores.² In 2017, Rolls-Royce reached a £671 million settlement with the UK's serious fraud office, US and Brazilian authorities, following a long-running investigation into allegations of bribery and corruption.³

UCL and Rolls-Royce

UCL has a number of ongoing ties with Rolls-Royce. The research work of UCL Mechanical Engineering is supported by funding from Rolls-Royce, among other industrial partners and research institutions.⁴ UCL partners with Rolls-Royce on major aviation research projects. UCL Energy Institute's ATS Lab at The Bartlett recently carried out a study looking at the market feasibility of UK domestic hydrogen aircraft operations as part of the NAPKIN project (led by Heathrow Airport, with Rolls-Royce as a partner).⁵ This research relationship has continued in the form of the EPSRC-funded TOZCA project, with funding ending in 2025.⁶ UCL is also listed as a partner in the UKRI-funded Rolls-Royce-led consortium "developing gas-turbine control system technologies" ending in 2026 which received a grant of £20,551,771.⁷ The 3DIMPact research group based at UCL's department for Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering also lists Rolls-Royce as an industry partner.⁸

UCL's website emphasises its ties with Rolls-Royce as a positive incentive for prospective students. UCL describes Rolls-Royce as an industry partner, accessible to students on courses such as Power Systems Engineering MSc.⁹ Rolls-Royce is also listed as sponsoring Mechanical Engineering MPhil/PhD studentships alongside arms companies Airbus and BAE systems as well as the UK Ministry of Defence.¹⁰

¹ <https://investigate.afsc.org/company/rolls-royce-hldgs>

² <https://caat.org.uk/data/companies/rolls-royce/>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jan/16/rolls-royce-to-pay-671m-over-bribery-claims>

⁴ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/mechanical-engineering/about/funders-and-partners>

⁵ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/energy/research-projects/2023/sep/new-aviation-propulsion-knowledge-and-innovation-network>

⁶ <https://gow.epsrc.ukri.org/NGBOViewGrant.aspx?GrantRef=EP/V000659/1>,
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/energy/research-projects/2023/mar/towards-zero-carbon-aviation-tozca>

⁷ <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=10039770>

⁸ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/civil-environmental-geomatic-engineering/research/groups-centres-and-sections/3dimpact>

⁹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/taught-degrees/power-systems-engineering-msc>

¹⁰ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/research-degrees/mechanical-engineering-mphil-phd>

Complicity - Links to Israel

Rolls-Royce are part of a production chain manufacturing fan propulsion systems for the F-35 fighter jet. According to information released by the Department for Business and Trade, Rolls-Royce is one of the registered companies for the government licence that allows unlimited exports for the F-35 combat aircraft to Israel.¹¹

The Israeli Air Force's F-35 fleet, also known as the Adir, was declared operationally capable in December 2017, marking the completion of an intensive integration and training effort conducted at Nevatim Air Force Base, Israel.¹² F-35 fighter jets have been used on numerous occasions in Israel's attacks on the besieged Gaza Strip.¹³ In February 2024, The Court of Appeal in The Hague cited "a clear risk that Israel's F-35 fighter jets might be used in the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law."¹⁴ Despite the government's recent suspension of "around 30" of 350 arms export licences to Israel amid concerns over compliance with international humanitarian law,¹⁵ the UK has continued to grant licences and export F-35 parts to Israel as recently as October '24.¹⁶

Rolls-Royce's German subsidiary MTU Friedrichshafen GmbH also makes the MT883 engine, which powers Israel's main battle tanks and armoured personnel carriers. The 'Merkava' tank has been used extensively in successive ground invasions and assaults on Gaza, Lebanon and the West Bank, including the 2023-2024 assault on the Gaza strip and invasion of Lebanon. Notably, they were instrumental in attacks on Gaza's Al Shifa Hospital and Indonesian Hospital, and have been documented as firing on and killing international aid workers.^{17,18} The Israeli military routinely use Merkava tanks to demolish Palestinian homes, infrastructure and agricultural lands.¹⁹ MTU also provide an estimated 80% of the Israeli Navy's patrol boat engines.²⁰

Previous BDS action

In May 2024, Cambridge University UCU branch overwhelmingly passed a motion calling for the university to boycott and divest from Rolls-Royce due to its complicity in the occupation, apartheid and current genocide in Palestine.²¹

¹¹ <https://www.declassifieduk.org/the-uk-companies-arming-and-the-people-resisting-the-occupation-of-palestine/>

¹² <https://www.f35.com/f35/global-enterprise/israel.html>

¹³ <https://aoav.org.uk/2024/uk-made-f-35-components-linked-to-civilian-casualties-in-gaza-strikes-new-evidence-published/>

¹⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/14/gaza-war-threatens-to-shut-down-the-wests-fifth-gen-fighter-programme>

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-suspends-around-30-arms-export-licences-to-israel-for-use-in-gaza-over-international-humanitarian-law-concerns>

¹⁶ <https://www.declassifieduk.org/f-35-components-sent-to-israel-from-royal-air-force-base/>

¹⁷ <https://investigate.afsc.org/company/rolls-royce-hldgs>

¹⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/14/gaza-israelis-attacking-known-aid-worker-locations>

¹⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/10/17/razing-rafa/mass-home-demolitions-gaza-strip>

²⁰ <https://investigate.info/company/rolls-royce-hldgs>

²¹ <https://www.ucu.cam.ac.uk/campaigning-for-boycott-and-divestment-in-solidarity-with-palestine-an-update/>