

BDS MOVEMENT | UCL

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

Cisco and Israel

Cisco is an American multinational digital communications technology conglomerate corporation with headquarters in California. Cisco develops, manufactures, and sells networking hardware, software, telecommunications equipment and other high-technology services and products. Outside the United States, they have offices in Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Germany, India, Israel, Japan, Poland, and the United Kingdom.¹ They state that they are 'closing the digital divide, empowering the future of work, fighting for equality and social justice, and building a regenerative planet'.²

Cisco 'knowingly provides Israel with technology that is deployed in its grave human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.'³ Cisco's complicity in Israel's crimes of apartheid and genocide are well documented, e.g.,

- Cisco Israel opened its first branch in 1997 and has continued to expand. It employs around 800 individuals across six development sites, and has acquired at least 20 companies, totaling an investment volume of US\$7.2 billion in the region. In February 2024, Cisco announced it would expand its operations in Israel by opening a new branch in Ofakim, which is a short distance from the war-torn Gaza strip.⁴
- 'Cisco provides the technological infrastructure to [automate apartheid](#) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories through targeted [surveillance systems](#). Cisco's technology enables Israel's genocide against 2.3 million Palestinians in the illegally occupied Gaza Strip through advanced military communication networks facilitated by Cisco's [Unified Communication systems](#).'⁵
- 'Cisco profits from its partnership with the Israeli occupation forces and willingly supplies its technology to strengthen Israel's [apartheid regime](#) – sometimes on a [pro-bono](#) basis'.⁵
- Cisco has racist employment policies whereby it pays skilled Palestinian employees significantly less than their Israeli counterparts.⁶
- A 33-page open letter by Cisco employees and shareholders expressed concern that Cisco is not abiding by its own stated principles ('Conscious Conduct', Human Rights Policy and Code of Business Conduct) in its work in Israel.⁷

¹ https://www.cisco.com/c/dam/en_us/about/annual-report/cisco-annual-report-2023.pdf

² <https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/about.html>

³ <https://bdsmovement.net/cisco>

⁴ <https://www.jpost.com/business-and-innovation/real-estate/article-785242>

⁵ <https://bdsmovement.net/cisco>

⁶ https://bdsmovement.net/sites/default/files/Cisco_Fact_Sheet.pdf

⁷ https://bdsmovement.net/sites/default/files/Open_Letter_From_Concerned_Cisconians.pdf

- In 2017, Cisco signed a cooperation agreement with the Municipality of Jerusalem to make Jerusalem the first 'smart city' in Israel.^{8,9} The Municipality includes occupied East Jerusalem, which was illegally annexed in 1967. As part of this agreement, Cisco installed communication equipment and CCTV, both of which support Israel's surveillance apparatus in Jerusalem, aimed mainly at its Palestinian residents¹⁰.
- In 2017, Cisco won a US\$250 million contract to provide services to the Israeli Ministry of Defense for three years.¹¹ According to the contract, Cisco was to supply the IDF and all of Israel's military and defense systems with servers and security infrastructure. These servers were to be integrated by the Israeli company Bynet Data Communications Ltd., which is involved in the mass surveillance, oppression, and denial of freedom of movement of Palestinians throughout Occupied Palestine.¹² The contract was extended for two more years, but in 2023, Dell won the tender.¹³
- In 2018, Cisco established a network of 100 'digital hubs' in partnership with the Israeli government,¹⁴ and declared these hubs to be part of Cisco's commitment to developing Israeli tech.¹⁵ These digital hubs are government-funded spaces fitted with Cisco hardware and utilising Cisco technology, and are designed to facilitate the integration of Israeli 'peripheral' small towns into the high tech industry.¹⁶ Seven of these hubs are in illegal settlements – which are war crimes under international law – five in the occupied West Bank, two in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights.^{17,18} These hubs were also expanded to the Naqab and Galilee, both of which are areas with a majority Palestinian population. In the Naqab, as of September 2023, 11 hubs have been opened, two of which are in Palestinian Bedouin towns.¹⁹ Israel has long sought to industrialize the Naqab and create more jobs to attract Jewish Israelis to settle there, while pushing indigenous Palestinian populations into over-crowded, under-resourced and ghettoized neighbourhoods.¹⁹
- In October 2023, Israeli newspapers²⁰ reported on a new national digital platform that helps in 'commanding the home front'. The platform is called 'Israel Rises' and it facilitates information flows by connecting data from the Israeli army, ministries, civil society organizations and volunteer groups. The system was developed with the support of Cisco to fit wartime needs.
- Early in October 2023, Cisco announced it would provide a one-time grant to each of its 800 employees in Israel, ranging from 9,500 to 19,000 NIS. The largest grants were for reservists in the Israeli military.²¹
- In March 2024, Cisco and Microsoft gave a total of US\$500 million to venture capital group Team8²² to invest in 30 startups in the areas of cyber, data infrastructure, fintech, digital health and AI.²³ Nadav

⁸ <https://www.calcalist.co.il/internet/articles/0,7340,L-3706879,00.html> (Hebrew source)

⁹ <https://www.pc.co.il/news/233962/> (Hebrew source)

¹⁰ <https://www.whoprofits.org/companies/company/6529?cisco-systems>

¹¹ <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001172350> (Hebrew source)

¹² https://bdsmovement.net/sites/default/files/Open_Letter_From_Concerned_Cisconians.pdf

¹³ <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001435447> (Hebrew source)

¹⁴ <https://newsroom.cisco.com/c/r/newsroom/en/us/a/y2018/m03/cisco-expands-network-of-digital-hubs-connecting-communities-and-businesses-in-israel.html?dtid=ossdc000283>

¹⁵ <https://www.calcalistech.com/ctech/articles/0,7340,L-3733438,00.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5149125,00.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.kolhair.co.il/realestate/48881/> (Hebrew source)

¹⁸ <https://www.whoprofits.org/companies/company/6529?cisco-systems>

¹⁹ Wind, Maya. 2024. *Towers of Ivory and Steel: How Israeli Universities Deny Palestinian Freedom*. London: Verso Books, eg p77-81

²⁰ <https://www.ice.co.il/digital-140/news/article/985471> (Hebrew source)

²¹ <https://www.calcalistech.com/ctechnews/article/bj8f1tft>

²² <https://team8.vc/team/>

²³ https://www.timesofisrael.com/backed-by-microsoft-and-cisco-israels-team8-raises-500m-to-help-build-startups/?origin=serp_auto#

Zafirir,²⁴ a former commander of Israel's cyber warfare unit 8200²⁵, founded the Team8 venture group in 2014 along with other veterans from Unit 8200.

UCL's links to Cisco

The links between UCL and Cisco exist through academic research partnerships, investment and through uses of hardware and software. Cisco proudly proclaims over 30 years of partnership with UCL,²⁶ primarily with Engineering and Computer Science.

- UCL invested £2,043,488 in Cisco stocks as of July 2023.²⁷
- Cisco is a regular attendee at UCL careers fairs,²⁸ the company has also sponsored fairs at the University,²⁹ and UCL students have been offered internships with Cisco³⁰. In 2018, UCL's Electronic and Electrical Engineering Department partnered with Cisco Institute to deliver a Prize for best student poster³¹.
- Cisco was a founding partner of UCL's Centre for Artificial Intelligence (AI), officially launched in 2019.³² UCL Centre for AI lists Cisco at the top of its list for strategic partnerships,³³ and Cisco has funded projects within the Institute of Communications and Connected Systems in 2020 and 2021:
 - Hybrid ICN Mapping and Interoperability Framework for Legacy Applications (£88k)³⁴
 - Privacy for the Internet of Moving Visual Things (grant size not specified)³⁵
 - Hybrid ICN Scalable On-demand Routing (£88k)³⁶
- Between 2018-2021, Cisco supported 18 AI masters scholarships at UCL for under-represented groups and ran a custom AI programme for 150 sixth-form girls in 2021.^{37,38}
- Cisco is listed as a partner in two doctoral training partnerships: UCL's UKRI Centre for Doctoral Training in Foundational Artificial Intelligence, which offered scholarships starting between 2019-

²⁴ <https://team8.vc/team/nadav-zafirir/>

²⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/what-is-israels-secretive-cyber-warfare-unit-8200-2024-09-18/>

²⁶ <https://gblogs.cisco.com/uki/the-ucl-ai-centre-helping-shape-the-future-of-technology/>: this 2019 blog post states that 'Our long-term relationship with UCL has already demonstrated the power of academic and commercial collaboration. Over the past 30 years, we've worked together on several leading edge digital projects and over 100 UCL students have joined us as interns, allowing us to nurture tomorrow's developers, engineers, cybersecurity experts, etc.'

²⁷ <https://bdsatucl.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/sarasinpartners-ucl-july2023.pdf>

²⁸ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2016/sep/ucl-careers-fairs-2016-your-chance-meet-potential-employers>

²⁹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/oct/connect-top-employers-industry-specific-careers-fairs>

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2017/oct/it-and-technology-careers-fair-18-19-october>

³⁰ <https://gblogs.cisco.com/uki/the-ucl-ai-centre-helping-shape-the-future-of-technology/>

³¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/electronic-electrical-engineering/news/2019/jul/barlow-memorial-lecture-and-prizegiving-2019-video-now-available>

³² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/computer-science/news/2019/sep/ucl-computer-science-launches-ucl-centre-artificial-intelligence>. Cisco's founding role in the AI Centre is referenced again here <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/sep/ucl-and-cisco-join-forces-help-uk-lead-way-ai>

³³ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ai-centre/strategic-partnerships>

³⁴ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/iccs/research-projects/2021/jun/hybrid-icn-mapping-and-interoperability-framework-legacy-applications>

³⁵ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/iccs/research-projects/2021/jun/learning-privacy-internet-moving-visual-things>

³⁶ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/iccs/research-projects/2021/jun/hybrid-icn-scalable-demand-routing>

³⁷ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/sep/ucl-and-cisco-join-forces-help-uk-lead-way-ai>

³⁸ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ai-centre/news/2021/jun/cisco-ucl-machine-learning-artificial-intelligence-young-women>

2023, and funded to 2027,^{39,40,41} and the EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Cybersecurity, which offered scholarships from 2019, funded to 2028.⁴²

- In 2021, UCL was the first university in the UK to become a 'Cisco x UCL' AI Global Centre of Excellence in the Future of Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence. UCL stated that 'Cisco will provide research funding for UCL academics and researchers, focused on the application of AI, primarily in the fields of collaboration technology, networking and cybersecurity. The new agreement, negotiated by UCL Computer Science Strategic Alliances Team (SAT), will enable academics doing relevant AI and ML research from across the university to apply for funding from Cisco.'^{43,44}
- More recently, Cisco is a named partner in the EPSRC (Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council) AI Hub in Generative Models, which received £10,250,181 in funding from Feb 2024 to Jan 2029.⁴⁵
- In the summer of 2024, Cisco was named the industry partner of UCL's Computer Sciences Summer School for 16-17-year-olds.⁴⁶
- In addition to these academic and research partnerships, every staff member who accesses UCL online resources remotely will be familiar with Cisco because UCL uses the Cisco AnyConnect Secure Mobility Client system for secure remote access.⁴⁷ It also uses Cisco as its main supplier of VoIP telephones throughout the University.⁴⁸

³⁹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/foundational-ai-cdt/partnerships>

⁴⁰ <https://gow.epsrc.ukri.org/NGBOViewGrant.aspx?GrantRef=EP/S021566/1>

⁴¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/foundational-ai-cdt/>

⁴² <https://gow.epsrc.ukri.org/NGBOViewGrant.aspx?GrantRef=EP/S022503/1>

⁴³ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/sep/ucl-and-cisco-join-forces-help-uk-lead-way-ai>

⁴⁴ <https://outshift.cisco.com/blog/furthering-the-uks-ambition-in-ai>

⁴⁵ <https://gow.epsrc.ukri.org/NGBOViewGrant.aspx?GrantRef=EP/Y028805/1>

⁴⁶ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/computer-science/collaborate/schools-outreach/ucl-computer-science-summer-school>

⁴⁷ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/isd/how-to/connecting-to-ucl-vpn-microsoft-windows>

⁴⁸ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/isd/services/telephony/how-to-obtain-new-or-replacement-telephone-handset>