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## *NATO's Obscure Relations With Israel*

**Ann Wright on the arms flowing between members of the military alliance and Israel, which despite its small size, ranks as the 15th top weapons importer in the world.**



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg bidding farewell to then resident of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, in June 2016. (NATO, Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

NATO has a long, close and relatively unknown relationship with Israel that in 2016 resulted in the establishment of an Israel office in the Brussels headquarters of the military alliance.

Underscoring the importance to Israel's association with NATO, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said upon the opening of the office, "This is an important step that helps Israel's security. It is further proof to the status of Israel and the willingness of many organizations to cooperate with us in the field of security."

NATO's invitation to Israel to take up residence in NATO headquarters was a result of pressure by other NATO members on Turkey to drop its veto of the invitation. The invitation arose through a new NATO partnership policy beginning in 2014 but Turkey vetoed the invitation until 2016.

Behind the scenes negotiations between Turkey and Israel in 2015 warmed the chilly relationship that had been essentially severed between the countries in 2010 over Israeli commandos killing 10 Turkish activists and wounding over 50 participants on the Mavi Marmara, a Turkish ship bound for Gaza as a part of the seven-ship Gaza Freedom Flotilla.

According to NATO documents, NATO and Israel have worked together for almost 30 years, cooperating in science and technology, counter terrorism, civil preparedness, countering weapons of mass destruction and women, peace and security.

To strengthen NATO naval interoperability NATO brought on Israel as a partner for its Operation Sea Guardian. Israel's military medical academy now serves as a "unique asset" for NATO's Partnership Training and Education Centers community.

Israel is not officially integrated in NATO but is part of the Mediterranean Dialogue, a program sponsored by NATO in cooperation with seven countries of the Mediterranean.

### **Arms Dealing**



The NATO secretary general on July 9, giving keynote speech at the Defense Industry Forum during the NATO Summit in Washington. (NATO, Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

NATO's long-standing working relationship with Israel has translated into NATO countries selling weapons to Israel and other countries buying weapons from Israel's big weapons industry.

With the exception of Canada, the Netherlands, Spain, and Belgium, the remainder of the 32 NATO members continue to sell/send weapons to Israel as Israel conducts genocide operations on Palestinians in Gaza.

Due to a court case, Denmark may suspend export of F-35 fighter jet parts to the U.S., because the U.S. sells the jets to Israel.

Even Latvia sold weapons to Israel, while Lithuania bought weapons from Israel. Greece, Albania, Slovakia, and many other NATO countries have purchased military equipment from Israel.

The Action on Armed Violence has a comprehensive worldwide listing of weapons sales and transfers to Israel.

### **US Main Supplier of Foreign-Sourced Weapons**



U.S. President Joe Biden at the NATO summit on July 10. (NATO/Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign aid since its founding in 1948, having received about \$310 billion in economic and military assistance. Since Oct. 7, 2023, the U.S. has passed legislation that has provided at least \$12.5 billion in military aid to Israel, which included \$3.8 billion from legislation in March 2024 and \$8.7 billion from a supplemental appropriation in April 2024.

Since Oct. 7, only two of the more than one hundred military aid transfers to Israel have reportedly met the congressional review threshold of \$250 million to be made public, and since the records for the other weapons transfers have not been made public, we can't be sure

Additionally, the Israeli military received expedited deliveries of weapons from a strategic stockpile of weapons that is normally used to replenish weapons for U.S. units in the Middle East. The U.S. has maintained massive warehouses for the stockpile of a huge variety and amount of weapons since the 1980s.

All of the Israeli Air Force's manned aircraft that are bombing people in Gaza are American-made, with the exception of one helicopter built by France's Airbus Helicopters. Israel is the first international operator of the U.S. F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the most technologically advanced fighter jet ever made, and had taken delivery of 36 of 75 F-35s by the end of 2023, paying for them with U.S. assistance.

In 2016 the U.S. and Israel signed a third 10-year Memorandum of Understanding covering the 2018-2028 period providing for \$38 billion in military aid; \$33 billion in grants to buy military equipment; and \$5 billion for missile defense systems.

Israel received 69 percent of its military aid from the U.S. in the 2019-2023 period, according to a March fact sheet issued by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Israel ranks 98th in world population, with a population of 9.4 million, only 0.11 percent of the world's population, and ranks 154th of all countries in land mass. Despite its small population and land, a study by SIPRI ranks Israel as the world's 15th top weapons importer, receiving 2.1 percent of all imports, according to globally available data from 2019-2023. Israel is the world's 9th top weapons exporter, responsible for 2.4 percent of exports.

### **Germany 2nd Largest Supplier**



Judge Nawaf Salam presiding over Nicaragua's case against Germany's arms shipments to Israel on April 30, 2024. (UN Photo/ICJ-CIJ/Frank van Beek)

Germany is the second largest weapons provider to Israel providing around 30 percent of all foreign weapons to Israel. In 2023, Germany approved military equipment and arms exports to Israel worth \$353.70 million, a 10-fold increase compared with 2022, This includes four

submarines. according to the German Economy Ministry data and data submitted to the International Court of Justice in Nicaragua's case against Germany for complicity in the genocide of Gaza.

In April, Nicaragua argued that Germany had breached the U.N. Genocide Convention by sending military hardware to Israel, thereby aiding and abetting genocide and violating international humanitarian law in Gaza.

Remarkably, after the International Court of Justice called on nations and citizens to do more to prevent the genocide, the ICJ ruled against issuing emergency orders to stop Germany's arms sales to Israel.

[Related: *ICJ: Israel's Occupation of Palestinian Territory Is Illegal*]

As a slap-in-the-face to reality, after denying the emergency request to halt German weapons to Israel, presiding Judge Nawaf Salam had the gall to say that the court

“remains deeply concerned about the catastrophic living conditions of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in particular in view of the prolonged and widespread deprivation of food and other basic necessities to which they have been subjected.”

Adding, that the court “considers it particularly important to remind all states of their international obligations relating to the transfer of arms to parties to an armed conflict, in order to avoid the risk that such arms might be used” to violate international law.



Germany's Tania von Uslar-Gleichen on April 9 during Nicaragua's case against the country for facilitating Israel's genocide. (UN Photo/ICJ-CIJ/Frank van Beek, courtesy of the ICJ)

The dissenting opinion in the ICJ ruling noted that the German government was not honest in its case:

“Indeed, since the closure of oral hearings, Nicaragua has brought to the Court's attention information from the German Government concerning the export licences granted for Israel in 2024. These include war weapons and other military equipment, apparently not for training or test purposes, as Germany had suggested in respect of certain earlier licences. Licences granted in 2024 concern, among other things, ammunition for machine guns; propellant

charges; items falling within the category of warships (surface or underwater), specialized naval equipment, accessories, components and other surface vessels; and, most ominously, an item falling into the category of chemical agents, biological agents, irritants, radioactive substances, associated equipment, components and materials. It is also worth pointing out that the Court dealt with ‘other military equipment’ as exclusively relating to non-lethal equipment. This was an oversimplification dealt with summarily by the Court since, under German law, certain lethal weapons may fall under the ‘other military equipment’ category.”

In April, citing international law and the ongoing genocide in Gaza, human rights lawyers asked the Berlin administrative court to suspend the German government’s decision to send 3,000 anti-tank weapons to Israel, according to Reuters. An export permit application for 10,000 rounds of ammunition to Israel had yet to be approved.

### **US Does Not Recognize ICJ Jurisdiction**

The U.S., which provides Israel with twice as much weaponry as Germany does not recognize the ICJ’s compulsory jurisdiction.

While the United States initially accepted the general compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ, it withdrew consent in 1985 after the ICJ issued an unfavorable jurisdictional decision in a case relating to U.S. military intervention in Nicaragua.

Subsequently, ICJ jurisdiction over the United States became contingent on specific treaty provisions — creating a limited exposure that the United States has generally sought to avoid, particularly in more recent years.

In 2005 and 2018, the United States responded to another series of unfavorable ICJ decisions by similarly withdrawing from the Optional Protocol for the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR).

### **Germany’s Sevim Dagdelen**



Sevim Dagdelen in 2013. (DIE LINKE Nordrhein-Westfalen Foto: Niels Holger Schmidt – Flickr, CC BY-SA 2.0, Wikimedia Commons)

German Member of Parliament Sevim Dagdelen spoke in Washington, D.C., on July 6 at the NO to NATO; YES to PEACE symposium and on July 7 at the rally for peace at the White House.

[See: *75 Years of NATO = 75 Years of Denial*]

In her talks, she said that while from 2019 to 2023, 30 percent of weapons into Israel came from Germany, in 2023, the percentage of weapons sent to Israel dramatically increased to 47 percent from Germany while the U.S. supplied 53 percent.

Dagdelen spoke of three myths concerning NATO.

First myth: That NATO is a defensive alliance abiding by international law.

Dagdelen said that

“over the last quarter century, NATO has waged unprovoked, illegal wars of aggression against Yugoslavia and Libya; and the United States, the leader of the alliance, invaded and occupied Iraq, in a catastrophic adventure – to name three notorious examples.”

Second myth: That NATO stands for democracy and the rule of law.

“The reality is that NATO has never had a problem with counting military dictatorships or fascist regimes among its members. Portugal, one of NATO’s founding members, murdered thousands of Africans in its colonial wars and tortured hundreds to death in concentration camps. That was never a problem for this particular collective of shared values, just as Erdoğan’s Türkiye, with its support for jihadists terrorist groups in Syria, poses no particular ethical problem for it today.”

Third myth: That NATO is a community of shared values and stands for human rights.

“In reality, the wars conducted by the United States and its Allies over the last 20 years alone have killed four and a half million people, as calculated by researchers at the esteemed Brown University. The torture and detention camp at Guantánamo Bay Naval Base is still in operation to this day. The journalist Julian Assange was tormented nearly to death for 14 years because he had published evidence of U.S. war crimes. Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right government continues to receive American and European support in the form of arms deliveries for its onslaught against Gaza, which cannot credibly be justified by recourse to the right of self-defense.”

**Italy, UK & France**

From 2013-2023, Italy was the third highest weapons seller to Israel providing 4.7 percent of foreign weapons, according to SIPRI .

In 2023, Britain granted export licenses to sell at least \$52.5 million of military equipment to Israel — mainly munitions, unmanned air vehicles, small arms ammunition and components for aircraft, helicopters, and assault rifles.

[Related: *Battle-Tested in Gaza: Britain's Next Drones?*]

The U.K. government does not give arms directly to Israel but rather licenses companies to sell equipment components into U.S. supply chains, such as for F-35 jets.

The most recent shipment of war equipment to Israel from France was electronic equipment for drones from the French firm Thales. The shipment took place on May 26, 2024.

### **Not Just NATO Members**



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg visiting South Korea to meet with President Yoon Suk Yeol, Jan. 30, 2023. (NATO, Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

South Korea's weapons trade with Israel has grown significantly, with \$47 million worth of arms sales to Israel over the past 10 years. The Hyundai corporation has sold equipment to Israel that is used to demolish Palestinian homes for Israeli settlement.

Penny Wong, the Australian foreign affairs minister, has said her country has not supplied weapons since the start of the Gaza conflict yet data from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) shows that in February 2024 alone Australia directly exported over \$1.5 million in “arms and ammunition” to Israel. At an Australian Senate Estimates hearing, the chief economist of DFAT acknowledged that Australia has exported \$10 million worth of “arms and ammunition” to Israel over the past five years.

Of the larger NATO partners, Japan and New Zealand have stopped selling weapons to Israel during the genocide period.



## **Washington Summit Statement Silent on Genocide**

While NATO members are deeply complicit in the Israeli genocide of Gaza, the final statement of the NATO summit in Washington mentioned nothing about the Israeli genocide of Gaza, the deaths of 38,000 Palestinians, the wounding of over 100,000 people and the destruction of housing, hospitals, schools, universities, religious buildings and U.N. facilities for 2.1 million Palestinians.

Instead, NATO included only a brief reference to the Middle East, referring to the region as the “southern neighbor.” The paragraph on the Middle East concludes that the NATO secretary general will designate a special representative for the southern neighborhood, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has agreed to have a NATO Liaison Office located in Amman, the NATO-ICI Regional Centre will continue in Kuwait and “based on the request of the Iraqi authorities, we have broadened the scope of our support to the Iraqi Security Institutions and will continue our engagement through the NATO Mission Iraq (NMI).”

**Ann Wright served 29 years in the US Army/Army Reserves and retired as a colonel. She served 16 years as a U.S. diplomat and resigned from the U.S. government in 2003 in opposition to the U.S. war on Iraq. She is a co-author of *Dissent: Voices of Conscience*.**

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