

Australian Labor government maintains military exports for Israeli war machine

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An article published by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) last Thursday has further exposed the federal Labor government's lie that it is not facilitating the export of arms or military goods to Israel as it continues its horrific genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.

Only days before, Defence Minister Richard Marles repeatedly dodged questions in an interview on the ABC's "Insiders" program about Australia's ongoing military exports to Israel. Pressed on the export of F-35 stealth fighter components and armoured steel to Israel, Marles simply stonewalled, repeated the government's line that "no weapons" were being sold to Israel.

When it was pointed out that the F-35 components were necessary for the sophisticated war plane, Marles again obfuscated, declaring that Australia was an "F-35 country," part of international supply chains and would continue to export the parts. Asked about the sale of armoured steel to the major Israeli military manufacturer, Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, Marles dismissed the question declaring a ban would have no impact.

He claimed that there had been "a lot of misinformation" about the issue but did not elaborate further.

The ability of the Labor government to lie about continuing military exports to Israel, even as it postures as an opponent of Israel's deliberate starvation of Palestinians in Gaza, depends on the secrecy surrounding government export permits. Last week's ABC article lifts the lid to provide a glimpse of the extent of the sales of military items to Israel.

In response to parliamentary questions on notice, the Defence Department replied that it had launched a review in June 2024 of 66 "active" permits approved prior to the outbreak of the Gaza conflict in October 2023. In other words, the review was initiated months after the murderous Israeli bombardment of Gaza began.

As reported last week, the review so far had resulted in

16 permits being amended or lapsed, 13 remained under review and 35 required "no further action." No details were provided as to what was being exported, in what quantities, by what companies, or indeed why 16 permits had been amended or lapsed.

When the review was announced last year, Marles told the ABC that the government would continue to scrutinise the exports to Israel but was "confident that those licences are for what we describe as dual-use technology."

In fact, that was another lie. The permits to export military-related goods have two categories—military-specific or dual use. Dual-use, as defined by the Defence Department applies to "items generally used for commercial purposes, but with potential military and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) application."

According to the Defence Department, the bulk of the permits under review were for military specific items. Of the 35 that remain "active," 31 are for military-specific items, as are all of the 13 still under review. Eleven of the 16 amended or lapsed permits were also military-specific, which is defined as items that are "designed or adapted for use by armed forces" or are "inherently lethal."

Questioned in the Senate estimates committee last November, Defence Deputy Secretary Hugh Jeffrey was deliberately vague declaring that just because an item was classed as military specific did not "equate to the assertion that we're exporting military equipment to Israel," adding: "It could go to, yes, munitions, but it also could go to body armour." It could also include night-vision goggles, he said. He did not say what was being exported.

The ABC reported that it had asked a series of questions of the Defence Department including on the process used to review permits, whether any active permits related to weapons and munitions and the status of the 13 permits still under review. As of publication last week, no answers had been provided.

The wall of silence surrounding the export of military-related items to Israel is clearly to cover up the fact that the Australian government is in breach of the UN Arms Trade Treaty which Australia has signed. The government's constant refrain that there have been no weapons exports to Israel is a deliberate diversion from the fact that other items, including components, come under the purview of the Treaty. It specifically covers not just weapons, but parts used in their assembly as well as munitions.

The Treaty specifically requires a signatory not to authorise exports if it has knowledge at the time that the arms or military items “would be used in the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, attacks directed against civilian objects or civilians protected as such, or other war crimes as defined by international agreements to which it is a Party.”

The most glaring known breach involves the continuing export of F-35 parts to Israel. According to the *Guardian*, a now deleted paragraph from the manufacturer's website, Lockheed Martin, declared: “As a programme partner, Australian businesses are supplying components for the entire F-35 fleet, not just Australian aircraft. Every F-35 built contains some Australian parts and components.”

Last month Labor's Foreign Minister Penny Wong once again defended the sale of F-35 parts to Israel, saying that the “components and parts that are non-lethal in nature.” The comment is absurd on the face of it. While an electronic component, or element of a weapons system, might be “non-lethal” in and of itself, like the firing mechanism of a gun, it could be critical to its lethal functioning.

A *Guardian* Fact Check last year noted as early as November 2023 that the Israeli military confirmed that F-35s were being used to “strike terror targets and assist ground forces in very close proximity strikes.” In February last year, a Dutch court found that F-35s were likely being used in attacks on Gaza, and there was a “clear risk” that parts exported from the Netherlands were “used in serious violations of international humanitarian law.”

Since then, Israel has used F-35s many times in its systematic reduction of the Gaza Strip to rubble and its slaughter of civilians—men, women and children. An Amnesty International Australia report last month stated: “F-35s have been repeatedly used by Israeli Forces in airstrikes on designated safe zones in Gaza, killing tens of

thousands of civilians.”

Israel has also deployed F-35s in its blatantly illegal acts of aggression throughout the Middle East—on Iran, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

The death toll in Gaza is now more than 62,000, including many journalists, health workers, aid workers and professionals. The deliberate starvation of the entire population is producing harrowing scenes of severely malnourished children, the killing of civilians queuing for food, and the deaths of desperate people scrambling for supplies from airdrops.

The federal Labor government has politically backed Israel's genocidal war, continued military exports to Israel, and waged a reactionary campaign to brand opponents of the Zionist regime's criminal actions as “antisemitic.” Its declaration that it will “recognise” Palestinian statehood at next month's UN General Assembly is simply a crude and cynical attempt to deflect mass popular outrage and will do nothing to halt Israel's relentless military operations.

That outrage was graphically expressed in this month's mass protest of hundreds of thousands across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. However, the Labor government's determination to continue military sales to Israel makes clear that no amount of pressure—as advocated by the Greens and various pseudo-left groups such as Socialist Alliance—will compel it to end its broader support for the Israeli regime as it routinely massacres civilians.

What is required is the building of a unified movement of the working class in Australia and internationally, independent of the pro-capitalist trade unions, to halt cripple the Israeli war machine through strikes and industrial action.



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