Overview of Arms Imports

How the Netherlands feeds the Israeli war industry

11 June 2025

Despite the ongoing genocide in Gaza, the Netherlands continues to buy weapons from Israel. In the last five years, the Netherlands purchased weapons from Israel for nearly two billion euros, making the Netherlands one of the largest customers. Half was ordered after October 2023. This funds the Israeli war chest. Purchases are made from Elbit, Rafael and Israel Aerospace Industries, which 'test' their weapons on Palestinians and sell this as *battlefield proven*. This must stop. The Netherlands should not buy weapons from countries that structurally violate the law of war.

Introduction

Over the past five years, Dutch purchases of Israeli arms have significantly increased. With a package of orders worth €1.9 billion, the Netherlands has become one of the main customers of the Israeli arms industry. Half of these were ordered after the start of the Israeli offensive in Gaza in October 2023. In short, the genocide has not put any brakes on that.

At the same time, criticism of this Defence policy is growing. According to a recent opinion poll, 46 percent of the Dutch population believes that the Netherlands should not import weapons from Israel, only 14 percent want to.

This briefing clarifies how important the arms industry is to Israel, how the Netherlands supports it with massive arms purchases and why it must stop.

Israeli arms industry is driving economy and lifeline Israeli army

- The arms industry is a crucial part of the Israeli economy;
- Israel is the world's largest arms exporter per capita;
- In Israel, military applications of information technology and robotics take centre stage: they are massively deployed in Gaza.

Israel's economy relies largely on the military industry, which is not only of great importance to the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), but also a factor in terms of exports. Companies rely heavily on exports to survive, given Israel's limited size. In 2024, Israel

exported EUR 13 billion worth of military equipment; 13 percent more than in 2023. Arms exports account for some 6 percent of total Israeli exports, making them one of the most important trade sectors. Everything is geared towards further expanding the arms industry.

That Israel's arms industry is among the 'world's best' is shown by the fact that, with a population of less than 10 million, the country is currently the world's eighth largest arms exporter. Converted per capita, it is by far the world's largest arms exporter. Particularly in the fields of drones, munitions and anti-aircraft, Israeli companies are among the world's best.

The IT sector is also closely linked to the military and is at the forefront of numerous new inventions in artificial intelligence and robotics that are being massively deployed in Gaza. Last year and a half, Israeli investigative journalists revealed how systems with names like *ChatIDF*, *Lavender*, *Gospel* and *Where's Daddy*, directed Israel's target selection. Using Gospel, intelligence officers were getting 100 targets a day - where this was previously 50 targets *a year*. "At this stage, I invested 20 seconds in each target. (...) I had no added value as a human being (...). It saved a lot of time." At the same time, it is clear that the algorithms used by the Israeli army rattle on all sides and cause massive numbers of civilian casualties.

Internationally sharply increased demand for weapons has created tightness in the international defence market and Israel sometimes seems to be able to deliver faster than others. Partly for this reason, the Netherlands opted for Israeli PULS missile artillery rather than the US HIMARS system.

Defence claims there are "virtually no concrete cooperation activities" between The Hague and Tel Aviv, but meanwhile it is buying more arms from Israel than ever before. The genocide of Palestinians in Gaza has not had any negative effect on arms purchases.

In fact, the reverse is true. The fact that the weapons have already been used by Israel first ("battle-tested" or "combat proven"), cynically, actually counts as advertising: the gear has proven itself. "The first question any government asks before buying anything from Israel is: Does the IDF use this?" said a former top Israeli defence ministry official. Israeli newspaper Haaretz headlined in 2024 that the war in Gaza was a selling point for Israeli arms manufacturers at the Singapore Airshow, Asia's largest arms fair. Or, as the Volkskrant recently concluded, "It may be clear where the technology has proven itself. Gaza is a testing ground from which the Netherlands thus also benefits."

Overview of Dutch arms orders in Israel 2019-2024

The bulk of Defence orders from Israeli companies go to Elbit, Israel's largest arms manufacturer. The rest goes mainly to Rafael and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI). Listed Elbit issues press releases about some of the orders; state-owned IAI and Rafael do not release anything about Dutch orders.

Below is an overview of the most important orders since 2019:

2019

In October, The Netherlands orders EUR100 million worth of communication and navigation equipment for Cougar helicopters from **Elbit.**

In late December 2019, Defence placed a follow-up order worth EUR 59 million with **Elbit** for so-called *Load Carriage and Protection (LCP)* systems for the soldier, as part of the army's VOSS (Improved Operational Soldier System) programme.

2020

In December 2020, **Elbit** received an order worth EUR 12 million for 4300 night vision combat helmets and over 3500 equipment kits.

That same day, a EUR45 million contract was also signed with **Elbit** for TORCH-XTM command systems and E-LynXTM (aka PNR-1000) radios, also for the VOSS.

2021

In January 2021, **Elbit** won a follow-up contract worth EUR 20 million to provide the army with new ('fully battle-proven') vehicle computers to replace systems delivered over a decade earlier.

As part of a €660million contract signed in January 2021 with UK-based BAE Systems (and Van Halteren Metaal as Dutch subcontractor) to modernise 122 CV90 combat vehicles, they will be equipped with **Rafael** Spike anti-tank weapons for an undisclosed sum. The Netherlands first bought these weapons early this century (already controversial at the time because of Israel's crackdown on Palestinians); follow-up orders have been placed in subsequent years.

In the same context, **Elbit** received an order of some EUR 68 million in February 2021 to supply Iron Fist *active protection systems* (APS) and COAPS viewers for the Army's CV90s to be modernised.

In April 2021, **Elbit** received a follow-un order of unknown value to equip the ninth NATO Airbus A330 tanker aircraft with the J- MUSIC DIRCM, meant to protect tankers from small incoming missiles (MANPADS). The NATO Multinational Multi-Role Tanker Transport Fleet of was commissioned by six participating countries (Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and the Czech Republic).

Three months later, Defence also ordered the same J-MUSIC DIRCM plus an infrared warning system (IR-PAWS) from **Elbit** for the Gulfstream G650 for an undisclosed sum.

2022

In early 2022, Defence ordered an unknown number of SMASH-AD systems for an undisclosed sum (via Dutch broker TBM) from the Israeli company **Smart Shooter** to equip assault rifles to more easily shoot out of the skydrones. Israel itself has also been using the Smart Shooter in Gaza since late 2023, and not just against drones; soldiers use them against people too.

In 2019, the Dutch police bought Elbit's i360 cyber intelligence system. The tap system turned out to be a fiasco -in 2024 it turned out that €4 million had been spent to fix all kinds of complaints about the system. So in 2024 the police covertly bought a new tap system, the Reliant X from Cognyte, another Israeli company, which had previously supplied the predecessor of the i360. The police would not say how much it paid for i360 and Reliant X, as those amounts are "subject to secrecy". Cognyte's new system, also did not work by the end of 2024, so Cognyte's old system is still being used. "As a result, the government is now stuck with two new, non-working tap systems and the police are still using an outdated and technically ramshackle eavesdropping system," NRC said. Cognyte (previously called Verint) is controversial for selling interception equipment to the junta in Myanmar. Norway's state pension fund - Europe's largest - has blacklisted it for its "unacceptable risk of contributing to serious human rights violations".

2023

In April, **Rafael** received an order worth EUR 50 million for launch systems for 'decoy missiles' for frigates of the Dutch navy.

In May 2023, Defence ordered 20 PULS missile artillery systems with accompanying missiles from **Elbit** for about EUR 285 million, the largest Dutch order from the Israeli arms industry in recent years and Elbit's first export order for the PULS. Within a year, the first two systems had already been delivered. Elbit refers to the missiles fired by the PULS as "combat-proven rocket artillery solutions".

In August 2023, Defence signed another contract with **Elbit**, this time for some EUR 51 million to supply ReDrone systems to disable enemy drones.

2024

In June 2024, it was announced that Defence, to replace the C-130 Hercules transport aircraft, will purchase five C-390M aircraft from Brazilian Embraer for EUR 1.7 billion. As part of this, Defence plans to buy protection systems from **Elbit** for an estimated EUR 50 million.

In September 2024, Defence selected **Rafael** to replace 200 ageing Spike launch systems, at an estimated cost of EUR 250 million; deliveries are scheduled over the next three years. The new systems increase the range of the weapons to a distance of 5 km.

In previous years, the Ministry of Defence had already placed orders for the delivery of hundreds of new Spike anti-tank missiles within the "Replenishment of Deployment Stockpile Ammunition" programme.

The same month, it was announced that two naval support ships ("armed sidekick ships" or *combat support ships*) to be built by Damen Shipyards will be equipped with weapons systems from **Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI)**: Barak missiles and Harop munitions as well as electronic warfare systems. Apart from defending against air targets, the weapons are also capable of attacking land-based targets. Total order value estimated at EUR 500 million.

In October, Defence announced the purchase from Airbus of 12 Caracal helicopters to replace the current Cougar fleet. In the process, it will purchase electronic equipment from **Elbit** for an estimated EUR100 million.

2025

In May, it was announced that the Ministry of Defence will equip the 46 new Leopard 2A8 battle tanks for an estimated EUR 100 million with **Rafael**'s Trophy protection system to shoot incoming explosive weapons out of the air.

Deployment of Israeli weapons in Palestine

Although very little information about Israel's deployment of specific weapons is made public due to military censorship, a few weapons purchased by the Netherlands in recent years are known to have been deployed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as Lebanon and Syria. Some examples are provided below.

Spike

The *combat-proven* Spike LR2, known in Israel as the Tamuz, is one of the latest versions of the SPIKE developed back in the years after the Yom Kippur War (1973). "Enhanced lethality against all types of targets; high hit probability," is how manufacturer Rafael praises the weapon. The anti-tank weapon was used extensively in the war against Lebanon in 2006, but the result of the 600 missiles fired was considered inadequate. At the time, Human Rights Watch (HRW) already found remnants of Spike missiles at the site of an attack on two ambulancesLebanese Red Cross.

Israel deployed the Tamuz again in 2009 (Operation Cast Lead) in the Gaza Strip. Again, HRW conducted extensive research into deployment of the Spike and concluded that both Heron and Hermes drones used this missile in attacks, causing many civilian deaths; survivors of these drone attacks showed serious injuries.

About an attack in the Gaza city of Rafah in August 2014, HRW writes how apparently a Spike rocket struck an UN-run boys' school, killing 12 people, including eight children, and injuring at least 25. About three thousand people were sheltering in the school at the time. Witnesses told HRW that many people were standing near the entrance of the school when the missile struck ten metres away.

In 2021, Israel probably deployed the Spike (and possibly the Harop) from the sea against targets in Gaza.

Little is known about the use of the Spike in the current destruction of Gaza - journalists can barely work there and Israeli military censorship is strong. Based on image analysis and expert analysis, the New York Times in July 2024 concluded use of a Spike or Mikholit missile in an attack on a busy street in Al-Mawasi, in southern Gaza, where aid workers were just helping victims of an earlier heavier series of bombs, presumably killing or injuring the aid workers.

In addition, a new variant, the Spike Firefly has already entered service in Gaza in 2023. This semi-drone version of the missile can fly around for a while in search of a target and then explode on it.

PULS

Elbit's *Precise & Universal Launching System*, better known in Israel as *Lahav,* is the Israeli army's (IDF) latest rocket artillery to replace the M270. While all the necessary permits for the weapon were not even in place yet, the Lahav was deployed in Gaza for the first time on 10 October 2023: "We didn't have an official shooting permit yet, we just went into a frenzy of learning and preparation [...] The capabilities of the launcher allow almost complete freedom of movement - therefore, wherever we were needed, we arrived quickly," said a sergeant major.

The battalion deploying the PULS system reportedly fired hundreds of Romach (in English Accular) rockets in those first weeks, capable of hitting targets across the Gaza Strip.

Harop

The Harop gained wide attention with its deployment in 2016 and 2020 by Azerbaijan in the war against Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. In the recent conflict between India and Pakistan, India also made use of it. In 2019 and 2024, Israel had already deployed the Harop against Syrian targets.

Say no to Israel's war crimes - stop buying Israeli arms

It has been incomprehensible, already for years, for the Netherlands to buy arms from Israel. Since October 2023, those purchases have become completely unacceptable. Let alone the huge influx of orders to the Israeli arms industry, as is the case now.

- Netherlands should promote international rule of law
- Arms purchases from Israel contradict this, and support Israel's genocide
- The Netherlands must stop buying Israeli weapons, following the example of Spain
- The Netherlands should start considering violations of international law in the country of purchase when buying defence equipment.

Article 90 of the Dutch Constitution requires the government to promote the development of the international legal order. This automatically implies that the Netherlands acts in line with international treaties, including, for example, the Genocide Convention.

Back in February 2024, the ICJ stated that Israel had to take "immediate and effective measures" to protect Palestinians in the Gaza Strip from the risk of genocide by ensuring adequate humanitarian assistance and basic services. Israel has not even done the minimum to comply. If so, stopping arms imports from Israel is a very obvious and effective message to Israel. Spain already took a clear first step by cancelling munitions contract for the police an already agreed Israeli and henceforth excluding Israeli companies from tenders by the defence and interior ministries. Last week, Spain cancelled also the purchase of Spike anti-tank weapons, which the Netherlands is also buying.

The government's reasoning in this regard is impermissibly passive, moreover using circular reasoning: that there are no sanctions on Israeli arms purchases and it is 'therefore' allowed, Minister Brekelmans said during the Defence Budget debate:

"If, in exceptional cases, we say we still want to restrict imports from companies, we do so by imposing sanctions. That is what we have done in the case of Russia. We have said we want to hit the Russian war industry. That is why sanctions have been imposed on all kinds of Russian companies in the EU context. In the case of Israeli companies, that is not the case. No European sanctions have been imposed, even with the idea that it is possible to influence the Netanyahu government through that type of sanctions. So, simply because there are no sanctions, we can import business from those companies. Again, because the need is so high, we choose to do that indeed."

If the government recognises that sanctions serve to hit the Russian war industry and protect Ukraine, then it should also start making efforts (together with Spain and like-minded countries) to impose sanctions against the Israeli arms industry. Of course, this should preferably be done in an EU context, and if that proves impossible with a coalition of like-minded countries or alone if necessary.

That Israeli companies would be the only ones able to supply Defence with military equipment at short notice should not be a reason to award orders to an industry directly linked to the armed forces (in the case of IAI and Rafael, the Israeli state even owns it) that is committing genocide in Gaza - whether sanctions are already in place or not. In any case, the reasoning makes it clear that Defence is guided by a deeply flawed moral compass.

The Netherlands has an export policy that explicitly considers the risk of human rights violations, aggression and violations of the law of war when granting arms export licences. A similar policy is lacking for arms purchases, while there is just as much risk of becoming involved in violations of international law with their purchase. Therefore, the government should start drafting policy on how violations of international law are taken into account when assessing defence procurement.

In that regard, the AIV advised (Advisory Council on International Affairs) the government, already in October 2024, to link arms imports from Israel "to the same strict [arms export] criteria and respect for rulings of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. Operationalise this in clear policy and also include the need for an early sustainable ceasefire."

Purchasing arms and thus sponsoring the Israeli arms industry by many hundreds of millions of euros makes the Netherlands jointly responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Politicians must now speak out strongly against the Netherlands' role in supporting an Israeli arms industry directly linked to a government guilty of ethnic cleansing.

The Netherlands can very easily send a strong signal by no longer buying military equipment developed at the expense of Palestinians who have been burdened by Israel's genocidal military campaign for more than a year and a half; Palestinians who yearn to live in peace and freedom.