

Lawyers Label Liz Truss ‘Absurd’ for Resuming Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia

UK government officials resumed arms sales despite raising concerns of potential Saudi war crimes in Yemen, lawyers for anti-arms campaigners tell High Court

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Lawyers representing anti-arms campaigners told the High Court on Tuesday it was “absurd” that former UK Prime Minister Liz Truss resumed arms sales to Saudi Arabia amid concerns that Riyadh had committed war crimes in Yemen.

The comments came as a judicial review brought by the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) and Mwatawa for Human Rights, challenging the UK’s continued licensing of arms sales to Riyadh despite those concerns, opened in the court.

Ben Jaffey, who represents CAAT, said emails obtained by his legal team showed that civil servants working at the Export Control Joint Unit had raised concerns with the Ministry of Defence over the sale, despite Truss stating that there was no pattern of Saudi war crimes in Yemen.

He added that Truss had made her decision despite the MoD actively tracking at least 528 alleged breaches of International Humanitarian Law in Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition.

“[The emails] are quite revealing and lay bare a logical flaw in how Britain resumed arms sales to Riyadh,” said Jaffey.

“No attempt was made even to make an assessment of some of the most grave allegations [by Saudi Arabia] as an entire category of attacks [by helicopters] was excluded from the UK government’s analysis.”

Jaffey also said that the pattern of attacks perpetrated by the Saudi-led coalition showed it was “unwilling to follow their own rules of engagement” in Yemen.

According to [Oxfam](#), the UK has licensed at least £7.9bn (\$9.6bn) in arms to Saudi Arabia across 547 licences since 2015, including Tornado and Typhoon aircraft and bombs.

CAAT says the true value of arms sales could be more than £23bn (around \$28bn) when additional “open licensees” are taken into account.

A previous court challenge by CAAT in 2019 forced the UK government to [suspend arms sales](#). But after an internal review, sales resumed in 2021 on the basis that the breaches of humanitarian law were “isolated incidents”.

The UK government has recently [refused to release](#) information in response to FOIs filed by Middle East Eye about arms sales to Saudi Arabia, following the coalition’s 2016 bombing of a crowded funeral hall in Sanaa, one of the deadliest of the war.

The Department of International Trade and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office both cited [a section of the Freedom of Information Act 2000](#), which exempts the release of documents when more than 24 hours of staff time – valued at £600 (\$742) – would be required to retrieve them.

MEE has filed a new, narrowed FOI request with DIT based on suggestions it provided when rejecting the original request. A response is expected by the end of February.

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Featured image: Anti-arms campaigners outside the Royal Courts of Justice as a judicial review into arms sales to Saudi Arabia begins (Source: MEE)

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