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Role of U.S. Menwith Hill NSA base and the UK in Gaza



By Dave Webb

Every Tuesday at 6pm, rain or shine, a small group of protestors stand outside a U.S. base in North Yorkshire with banners and flags. Members and supporters of the [Menwith Hill Accountability Campaign](#) (MHAC) are there to protest at the unaccountable and highly secret activities that go on inside the U.S. spy base nominally called 'RAF' Menwith Hill but run by the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA). In recent weeks the focus has been on the UK's role in events in Gaza.

Just how is the UK government involved in Gaza? According to the Campaign Against the Arms Trade, the UK has consistently sold arms to Israel since 1967. Thousands of Palestinians have been killed by Israeli military actions supported by UK arms exports. Israel's bombardment of Palestinians in Gaza and the forced displacement of innocent civilians fly in the face of international humanitarian law, and the UK is assisting in these war crimes in more ways than one.

One way will be through the activities at Menwith Hill. Operatives there are busy supplying the U.S. intelligence services with information, some of which will be used to help the Israeli Defence Forces target their attacks in Gaza.

In 2016 top secret documents obtained by Edward Snowden showed that Menwith Hill collects and analyses satellite data obtained by intercepting electronic communications (emails, texts, telephone calls, etc) and passes on anything of interest to the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA). The Snowden documents revealed that, in the past, the NSA has used the powerful eavesdropping technologies at Menwith Hill to provide “continuous coverage of the majority of the Eurasian landmass,” where they can readily intercept “tactical military, scientific, political, and economic communications signals.”

In the past, the information gathered has helped target armed drone strikes across the Middle East and North Africa and Menwith Hill has provided support for British and American military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. And it has also been used to assist with covert missions in countries where the U.S. has not declared war. As Ryan Gallagher wrote in the Intercept, “NSA employees at Menwith Hill have collaborated on a project to help ‘eliminate’ terrorism targets in Yemen, for example, where the U.S. has waged a controversial drone bombing campaign that has resulted in dozens of civilian deaths”. In 2021 MHAC and Yorkshire CND jointly published a booklet called “Menwith Hill in 3D: Domes, Data & Drone Strikes” which explores the issues around the legality of the activities of the base, including the disclosures made by Edward Snowden.



Documents leaked by Snowden have revealed that the NSA “maintains a far-reaching technical and analytic relationship with the Israeli SIGINT National Unit (ISNU)” and the

documents show that the NSA and ISNU are “sharing information on access, intercept, targeting, language, analysis and reporting.” There can be little doubt then, that Menwith Hill will have been working all hours over the last few weeks to provide information to help the Israeli attack particular targets identified by the intercepted information. Matt Kennard and Mark Curtis, writing in *Declassified UK*, have described how the UK military and intelligence services may be aiding Israel’s attack on Gaza. In December 2020, a military cooperation agreement was signed by Britain and Israel. Despite the UK MoD describing it as an “important piece of defence diplomacy” which “strengthens” military ties, the British parliament and public has never seen what is in it. The MoD has refused to publish it and has only briefly mentioned it in parliament once, in a response to a direct question from an MP.

Declassified UK has also revealed that, since the bombing of Gaza began, the RAF has made over 30 military transport flights to Tel Aviv. The MoD is now censoring requests for information by MPs about flights from the RAF base at Akrotiri in Cyprus, which is only 40 minutes from Tel Aviv by plane.

There are also reports that the US is using RAF Akrotiri to send arms to Israel. RAF Akrotiri has, for a long time, been the base from which British bombing campaigns have been carried out across the Middle East and it was recently revealed that 129 US airmen are permanently based there. The government has denied sending ‘lethal aid’ to Israel, the censoring of MPs’ requests indicates that RAF Akrotiri is being for just that purpose.



Information from electronic communications is also being collected by aircraft and the MoD has sent the Israeli forces several Shadow R1 reconnaissance aircraft to help the Israeli forces find and rescue hostages. They claim that, as the aircraft are unarmed, they have no military role, but it seems highly unlikely that information on Hamas positions will not be passed on.

So, the UK is helping Israel's slaughter of Palestinians not only by supplying arms, but also by supplying intelligence information to help target the attacks. The protestors standing outside the Menwith Hill base in the cold and the rain, are reminding the British public and politicians that the U.S. spy base at Menwith Hill continues to play a crucial role in conflicts that are of concern to the U.S. – which means any conflict, anywhere on Earth.

~ Dave Webb is the board convenor of the Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space. He also chairs Yorkshire Region CND and lives in Leeds, England.