

SHIPPING GIANT MAERSK VIOLATED SPANISH EMBARGO ON SENDING MILITARY GOODS TO ISRAEL, RESEARCHERS SAY

Researchers reveal the significant role the Danish firm has played in delivering military goods to Israel, including armored vehicles.

Natasha Lennard

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An undated photo of gantry cranes and a Maersk container ship in the port of Ashdod, Israel. Photo: Planet One Images/UCG/Universal Images Group via Getty Images

IN LATE OCTOBER, yet another [video](#) from Gaza showed dozens of Palestinian men rounded up, blindfolded, and hauled away by Israeli soldiers. In the footage, broadcast by an Israeli news channel, the Palestinian hostages, reportedly from the besieged city of Jabalia in

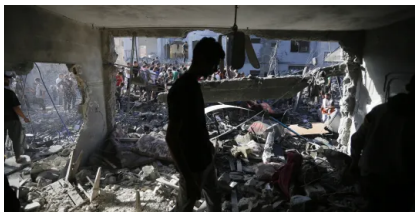
northern Gaza, were crammed inside the cargo bed of an Israeli military truck.

The vehicle appears to be an Oshkosh M1085 5-Ton Long Cargo medium tactical vehicle.

Over the last year, the Israeli military has received at least 100 of Oshkosh armored vehicles like the one in the video. They arrived on vessels operated by the commercial shipping and logistics giant A.P. Moller Maersk.

Israel has [long](#) used armored vehicles as [killing](#) machines throughout the occupied Palestinian territories. Images of Palestinians crushed by Israeli tanks and trucks are now grimly familiar to anyone paying attention to the ongoing Israeli onslaught in Gaza.

Maersk's role in shipping the Oshkosh armored vehicles came to light as part of a [new investigation](#) from researchers with the Palestinian Youth Movement and Progressive International. The investigation details how Maersk has shipped millions of pounds of military goods, including hundreds of armored and tactical vehicles and their components, to the Israeli Ministry of Defense since Israel's genocidal war began last year.



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The findings, shared in advance with The Intercept, reveal the significant role that Maersk – a publicly traded, family-controlled company – has played in delivering military goods to Israel, including tanks and other armored vehicles or their parts, aircraft components, armored plates, parts for artillery systems, and many hundreds of shipments that are unidentified or unspecified “military equipment.”

Analyzing shipment export data from over 2,000 shipments over the last year, the researchers report that they were able to reveal a commercial supply chain rife with materiel bound for use in Israel's assault on Gaza. The researchers said the available shipping data suggests that Maersk ships violated a Spanish embargo policy by transiting through the port of Algeciras.

The Spanish embargo bars cargo ships carrying weapons that could be used for war crimes from making calls in Spanish ports; in May, the foreign ministry said the rule would apply to military goods bound for Israel. Since then, Maersk ships with military goods headed for Israel, including equipment for putting bombs on aircraft, frequently transited through Algeciras, one of the largest ports in Europe, said Palestinian Youth Movement and Progressive International researchers. (Maersk did not respond to a request for comment.)

In response to a request for comment from The Intercept, a Spanish foreign ministry spokesperson said, "The MFA has rejected and will continue to reject all requests to call at Spanish ports of vessels carrying military material and having Israel as final destination."

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"We are studying the information with those ministries responsible for the control and entry of goods into national territory to clarify what happened," the spokesperson said. "If the information is confirmed, all necessary measures will be taken. The MFA has made and continues to make repeated appeals to tighten controls so as to ensure strict compliance with its decisions on this matter."

"We can clearly state that Spain is violating the law," said Irene

Montero, a member of European Parliament from the Spanish left party Podemos. “Article 8.1 of Law 53/2007 on the Foreign Trade of Arms states that the authorization for the transit of military material must be suspended when there are ‘rational indications’ that the material will be used to exacerbate conflicts, in a manner contrary to human dignity, or in a human rights violation.”

She added, “This means that even if the official destination of the military material is not Israel, if there are indications that the material could reach Israel and be used in a way that constitutes a human rights violation, the Spanish government should also prohibit the transit of those arms.”

Spanish authorities turned away a ship with weapons bound for Israel in May, shortly after the embargo was explicitly imposed.

“This is the first time we have done this because it is the first time we have detected a ship carrying a shipment of arms to Israel that wants to call at a Spanish port,” Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares [said](#) at the time. “The foreign ministry will systematically reject such stopovers for one obvious reason: the Middle East does not need more weapons, it needs more peace.”

The Research

Calling for Spanish authorities to search the vessels and enforce the ban, the researchers said data shows Maersk has made almost 1,000 shipments of goods to the Israeli military through Algeciras since the embargo announcement.

“This is an American genocide, financed by U.S. military sales and

Organizers with the Palestinian Youth Movement and Progressive International hope that their research into Maersk

manufactured by U.S. arms companies.”

strategies.

will draw attention to the global supply chains enabling Israel’s war, so that activists can [hone their](#)

“This is an American genocide, financed by U.S. military sales and manufactured by U.S. arms companies,” said Kaleem Hawa of the Palestinian Youth Movement, a lead researcher on the Maersk campaign. “There is a cumulative system; of arms components flowing to the U.S. manufacturers, of weapons flowing to the Israeli military, and of goods from stolen land flowing out of Palestine – every chain of complicity that sustains the Israeli project of mass death depends on logistics companies like Maersk.”

The Palestinian Youth Movement, a Palestinian-led diaspora group, [launched](#) the “Mask Off Maersk” campaign last June to shed light on the shipping firm’s role in facilitating the circulation of materiel deployed in Israel’s assaults on Palestine and Lebanon. The group aims to build a movement around an extra-congressional strategy, which it calls a “people’s arms embargo.” The idea is to target the infrastructure that makes Israel’s Western-backed assault possible, through a strategy of mobilizations, divestment, and labor action.





Palestine solidarity protesters organized by the Palestinian Youth Movement demonstrate outside the Maersk office in Mississauga, Canada, on June 11, 2024. Photo: Mert Alper Dervis/Anadolu via Getty Images

The U.S. government is responsible for [providing](#) nearly 70 percent of Israel’s imported arms, such as fighter jets, missiles, and thousands of devastating [2,000-pound bombs](#).

Though it is often unclear what materiel Maersk ships, the company has been contracted by the Pentagon to transport weapons to Israel. Information on Maersk shipments to the Israeli military on behalf of the American government is hard to uncover, the researchers said, due to the limited information available to the public about the nature of the shipments.

“Freight Forwarders”

The Palestinian Youth Movement and Progressive International’s research focuses on the millions of pounds of military goods transported to Israel aboard Maersk commercial vessels in the last year.

Most of the shipments reviewed departed from the port of Elizabeth, in New Jersey, Maersk’s largest East Coast terminal, operated by its [subsidiary](#) APM, which handles more than [2,500 trucks’ worth](#) of daily shipments. The campaign’s researchers sifted through shipment data to scrape Harmonized System Codes, or HS Codes, to establish the nature of the contents sent from Elizabeth to Israel’s military.

Interglobal Forwarding Services, an American firm incorporated in New Jersey, operates as the U.S.-based freight forwarder for the Israeli Ministry of Defense – that is, the company that organizes the movement of shipments.

The use of freight forwarders allows the Israeli military to obscure from the public the original manufacturer of the military goods, with only the freight forwarder listed as the “shipper.” Only through decoding data from bills of lading – the term for shipping contracts and documents – were researchers able to trace the contents to manufacturers of military goods.



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Among the firms involved were the Oshkosh Corporation and Rolls-Royce Solutions America, which makes the engines used in Israel’s Namer armored personnel carrier – also shipped by Maersk. (Oshkosh, Rolls-Royce, and Interglobal did not respond to requests for comment.)

According to the researchers, several of the shipments’ listed contents correspond with “at least three” arms deals made between the U.S. and Israel in the last year. The Biden administration has repeatedly [approved](#) U.S. funding for Israel to buy American-made weapons, for example, blessing more than \$700 million in both aid for and sales of Oshkosh tactical vehicles.

In addition to the traceable shipments, data reviewed by the researchers reveals vast amounts of unidentified and uncategorized military cargo sent from the U.S. to the Israeli military on Maersk container ships.

“While most records in the dataset contain descriptions of the items contained within each shipment, a substantial number of records omit any such information,” the researchers said in a statement.

“Unidentified cargo – shipments with entirely blank descriptions of their contents in their respective bills of lading – accounted for almost 35 percent of all observed shipments since the beginning of the war on Gaza.”

Over 6 million pounds of cargo have been shipped to the Israeli military by Maersk with contents “unidentified” in shipping logs, without any specific content code or listing of a specific manufacturer as the sender. Only Interglobal Forward Services is listed.

Interglobal came under fire in a 2017 [report](#) by the International Peace Information Service, an independent human rights research institute, for its shipping activities during Israel’s 2014 assault on Gaza. At the time, the freight forwarder’s shipping documents did not report the name of the companies that were actually shipping military equipment to Israel.

The 2017 report noted that, as much as a decade ago, “the bills of lading accompanying shipments of military and associated equipment to Israel on commercial vessels” were “poorly described and mostly in generic terms.” As with the Maersk shipments in the last year, “Hundreds of bills of lading only included ‘military equipment’ as a description of the cargo.”

Now, some Spanish observers want their government to take actions to halt the flow of military goods through Spanish ports.

“The government of Spain has lied repeatedly about the sale, purchase and transit of weapons destined for Israel throughout this year of Genocide,” said Ione Belarra, a politician with Podemos. “It is time for Spain and Europe to comply with their legal obligations and suspend all commercial and diplomatic relations with a terrorist state like Israel.”

Update: November 4, 2024, 2:17 p.m. ET

This article has been updated to include a statement to The Intercept from the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was received after publication.

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