



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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See also the Lords debate on the Queen's Speech, included in the Israel section below.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Prime Minister's Questions

Keir Starmer (Labour): ... I want to raise the appalling rise in antisemitism in the last week, and the attacks and violence that we have seen. On Saturday, a rabbi in Chigwell was hospitalised after being attacked outside his synagogue. Many of us will have seen the appalling incident in Golders Green. The Community Security Trust reports a 500% rise in antisemitic incidents since the outbreak of violence in Gaza and Israel. I know that the Government are working on this, and both the Prime Minister and I have condemned these antisemitic attacks and violence, but across this House we all know that Jewish communities remain very anxious. What more does the Prime Minister think can be done to provide the extra support and protection needed to reassure Jewish communities at this really very difficult time?

The Prime Minister: I share the right hon. and learned Gentleman's horror at the outbreak of antisemitic incidents. The Government have conveyed that message loud and clear to those who are responsible for enforcing the law against hate crime of that kind. Obviously, we will continue to work and support the Jewish community in any way that we can, particularly by working with the Community Safety Trust, which does an absolutely outstanding job, but also by showing, as a country and as a society, that we will call this out at every stage. We will not let it take root; we will not allow it to grow and fester. In welcoming his remarks, I may say that I believe it is one of the most important changes of attitude—or U-turns, I should say—that I have seen from the Labour party in recent times. I am delighted that he is taking that attitude now. But what this country wants to see is a Government who get on with delivering on the people's priorities, making everybody safe. It might have been a good thing if he had voted—and got his party to vote—for tougher sentences against serious and violent sexual offenders, to say nothing of people who commit hate crime.

House of Commons Written Answer

Religious Buildings: Music

Michael Fabricant (Conservative) [608] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he publish a timescale for allowing choral singing and performance to resume in English cathedrals and churches as covid-19 restrictions are eased; and if he will make a statement.

Eddie Hughes: The roadmap to reopening published on 22 February set out the steps by which restrictions on activities will be lifted and the considerations that will determine the rate of progress. Singing, playing some musical instruments, shouting and physical activity increases the risk of transmission through small droplets and aerosols and the cumulative effect of aerosol transmission means the more people involved, the higher the risk of transmission.

From 17 May, when Step 3 of the roadmap is taken, indoors in a Place of Worship a group of up to 6 amateur singers can perform, or rehearse for performance. There is no limit on the number of professional singers but they should follow guidance for the performing arts. Outdoors, the congregation may join in with singing in multiple groups of up to 30. Congregation members should continue to follow social distancing rules. A decision on whether to allow larger performances and communal singing in a place of worship will be taken as we approach Step 4 of the roadmap, no earlier than 21 June.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/608>

The roadmap referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021>

Scottish Government

Cabinet and Ministers

First Minister:

Minister for Drugs Policy:

Nicola Sturgeon

Angela Constance

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery:

Minister for Parliamentary Business:

John Swinney

George Adam

Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy:

Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (also working alongside the Net Zero Secretary):

Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise

Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth:

Kate Forbes

Richard Lochhead

Ivan McKee

Tom Arthur

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care:

Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport:

Humza Yousaf

Maree Todd

Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care:	Kevin Stewart
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills:	Shirley-Anne Somerville
Minister for Children and Young People:	Clare Haughey
Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training:	Jamie Hepburn
Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport:	Michael Matheson
Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform (also working alongside the Rural Affairs Secretary):	Mairi McAllan
Minister for Transport:	Graeme Dey
Cabinet Secretary for Justice:	Keith Brown
Minister for Community Safety:	Ash Denham
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government:	Shona Robison
Minister for Equalities and Older People:	Christina McKelvie
Minister for Social Security and Local Government:	Ben MacPherson
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands:	Mairi Gougeon
Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture:	Angus Robertson
Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development:	Jenny Gilruth

Welsh Government

Cabinet and Ministers

First Minister:	Mark Drakeford
Counsel General designate and Minister for the Constitution:	Mick Antoniw
Minister for Finance and Local Government:	Rebecca Evans
Economy Minister:	Vaughan Gething
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip:	Dawn Bowden
Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd:	Lesley Griffiths
Minister for Social Justice:	Jane Hutt
Deputy Minister for Social Partnership:	Hannah Blythyn
Minister for Climate Change:	Julie James
Deputy Minister for Climate Change:	Lee Waters

Minister for Education and the Welsh Language:

Jeremy Miles

Minister for Health and Social Services:

Eluned Morgan

Deputy Minister for Social Services:

Julie Morgan

Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing:

Lynne Neagle

[TOP](#)

Israel

House of Lords Debate

Queen's Speech

col 601 Lord Polak (Conservative): ... I welcome the Government's commitment in the gracious Speech to stopping public bodies imposing their own approach or views about international relations by preventing boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns against foreign countries. The Government made it clear that legislation is required to address concerns that such boycotts may legitimise anti-Semitism. I ask my noble friend the Minister, in this context, to go one step further. I am sure it has not gone unnoticed by my noble friend that in recent days, our close friends the United States, Canada and Australia have all pulled out of Durban IV. On 6 May, the Canadian Member of Parliament Anthony Housefather said that Ottawa has confirmed that it will avoid the gathering in South Africa known as Durban IV, which, he says, "continues to be used to push anti-Israel sentiment and as a forum for anti-Semitism."

I raised this issue in this Chamber on 22 April and asked if the Minister would confirm that the UK would not attend Durban IV. I did not receive an answer, so, in posing this question again, I will add only this: what is it that the FCDO knows better than its counterparts in the United States, Canada and Australia? Perhaps, I could put it a different way: what is it that those three countries understand that the FCDO does not?

I celebrated Shavuot on Monday and Tuesday of this week. For those two days, my family was peacefully unaware of the updated news, but let me tell noble Lords what I saw. I saw ramped-up security at the synagogue, with excellent co-operation between the Met Police and the community security trust. Many members of the Jewish community are rightly terrified. I thank the Home Secretary and the Communities Secretary for their comforting open letter to the Jewish community, published just today. ...

The shocking and disturbing scenes on the streets of north-west London this weekend absolutely do not represent the views of the vast majority of Muslims living in the UK; and I would argue that the murderous acts of Hamas, indiscriminately firing deadly rockets at civilian areas in Israel, do not represent the views—and certainly not the interests—of the majority of the Palestinian people.

col 602 My noble friend Lord Shinkwin put it succinctly this morning in a letter to the *Telegraph*—I quote him because I could not possibly put it any better: "The repercussions for civilians caught up in the current conflict on both sides are tragic, but we should never lose sight of what is at stake. Israel's right to exist is under sustained and insidious attack from the terrorist Hamas regime and its puppetmaster, Iran. Hamas's cynicism knows no bounds. It thinks nothing of diverting international aid from hospitals to bunkers, building rocket factories in civilian areas, and using children as human shields, all in pursuit of its overriding goal: the destruction of the Jewish state." ...

In conclusion, does the Minister agree that we should increase pressure on Iran to stop supplying rockets and know-how to Hamas? Does he also agree with my friend Dore Gold,

who said: "The mistake of the 2015 nuclear deal must not be repeated, with billions of dollars going to Iran, fuelling the next wave of terrorism—including the terror of Hamas. Not only is the security of Israel at stake but the security of the wider Western alliance"?

col 611 Baroness Ludford (Liberal Democrat): ... I want to raise the Alliance for Middle East Peace, brought into even greater relevance by the present renewed conflict between Israel and Hamas and the appalling intercommunal violence within Israel. This group, founded in the United States some years ago, consists of over 100 NGOs working to foster reconciliation. The plan, supported by legislation in Congress, is to set up a sizeable international fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace, inspired by our own successful International Fund for Ireland. It would bring together public and private donors to focus on supporting joint initiatives and co-operation between Israelis and Palestinians, and between Arabs and Jews in Israel and the wider region, encompassing both business and economic development and a range of civil society projects.

The Britain-Israel all-party group chaired by Bob Blackman MP and the noble Lord, Lord Turnberg, wrote to the Foreign Secretary earlier this month, in a letter I was pleased to co-sign, urging UK support for this fund and that the opportunity for a place on the board should be taken up. No reply has been received ...

col 617 Baroness Deech (Crossbench): ... I urge the Government not to forget their long-standing true allies in the Middle East, despite the untruths and hatred that have spewed forth in the past week in connection with the Israel-Hamas dispute. I call for a fair and open-minded assessment of the situation, with a perspective from British history and in relation to the rest of the Middle East. ...

col 618 ... I urge the Government not to follow Biden and not to join in an effort to remove sanctions against Iran, thereby enabling it to continue to smuggle weapons, to continue its terrorist activities and, of course, to support Hamas in its drive to dominate the Middle East. ...

Hamas's aim is not a state of Palestine, for that has been rejected several times over the years; it is the replacement of Israel by an Islamist state and the removal of every last Jew from Israel, just as all Jews have been dispossessed, persecuted, expelled, forbidden to live in or killed in that area. Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Algeria, Libya, Yemen and Lebanon are all Judenrein. The truth is that the dominant powers there cannot accept any Jewish presence in the area, and that is why ordinary negotiations between Israel and the others cannot succeed. Israel is the only state on earth whose enemies want to wipe it off the face of the earth.

Meanwhile we have taken our eyes off the real issues in that area. Syria appears to have been discussed in this House only once in the past year. Some 400,000 people have been killed there, including many Palestinians; 6 million people have been internally displaced and more than 6 million have fled. Its horrors and those of Lebanon, Yemen and Afghanistan make no mark. The Turks launched an attack on the Kurds, and there was no reaction. Islamists killed 94 Afghan schoolchildren and a Kabul mosque was bombed, and there was no reaction. Will the Minister proscribe Hamas in full to curb its actions?

The other action this country can take in order to calm the atmosphere is to withdraw from the forthcoming follow-up conference of the Durban racism conference of 2001. That conference degenerated into a hate-filled anti-Semitic meeting uniquely critical of Israel, giving cover to the real human rights abusers of the world. Attendees at the conference compared its anti-Jewish hysteria to 1930s Germany. The track record of Durban has been to harm race relations, poison progress and encourage anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and attacks. The USA, Australia and Canada have withdrawn from the Durban conference, and it is expected that other democratic countries will also do so, judging by their non-participation in previous follow-up conferences. I join the noble Lord, Lord Polak, in asking the Government to act to curb vicious anti-Semitism disguised as anti-Israel activity. Will the Government withdraw from Durban right now? ...

col 623 Lord Boateng (Labour): ... We are rightly thinking about the Middle East at this time. There was a great teacher by the name of Hillel in the Middle East, who lived at the time of our Lord. He said: "If I am not for me, who will be for me?"

Yes, it is important to recognise our national self-interest, but he added: "If I am only for me, what am I?"

We share a common humanity. He also asked: "If not now, when?" We need focus, we need resources and we need to act now.

col 633 Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat): ... I deplore all violence and deaths on all sides of the conflict but, as the occupying power and an illegal one at that, the Israeli Government have failed in their duty to uphold the equality and human rights of the occupied people. In the Government's efforts to secure a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza, will they emphasise that there must be no return to "normal"? That would be an abomination. "Normal" for the Gazan means a blockade, violations of human rights, the detention of children and daily humiliations. Will they also demand transparency from both parties and open access for journalists and independent observers? ...

col 638 Lord Marlesford (Conservative): ... Political Islam's umbrella, which shields and justifies the multiple Islamic movements, is the Muslim Brotherhood. ... In 1981, it assassinated President Sadat for making peace with Israel. The Muslim Brotherhood won Egypt's parliamentary election in January 2012 and ruled Egypt, with President Morsi, until July 2013, when it was removed by the army, following a huge popular uprising after Morsi tried to introduce an Islamist constituency.

In 2015, the British Government's own review, under Sir John Jenkins, found that the MB was "contrary to our values... to our ... interests and our national security."

It was also implicated in the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing. Yet today, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ibrahim Munir, lives and works in London. How do the Government defend this? ...

col 641 Lord Sheikh (Conservative): ... I, like many other Muslims across the world, was disturbed by the Israeli attack on the al-Aqsa mosque. To us Muslims, that mosque is the third holiest place in the world. I have visited it three times and prayed at it. It is sacred, and I believe that what has happened is sacrilege. Can my noble friend the Minister comment on what happened and perhaps try to ensure that it does not happen again? ...

col 645 Lord Alderdice (Liberal Democrat): ... there is nothing surprising about the mounting violence in Israel/Palestine. My friend Yair Lapid, who is currently trying to put together a new coalition Government in Israel, this week said: "We are on the edge of the abyss. We knew it was coming. We have seen this disintegration coming".

The disintegration of which he spoke is what makes this violence different from before, because now Arab Israelis have risen up against their Jewish-Israeli neighbours. It is not just Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank. ...

Agreements with authoritarian Arab leaders will not carry the Arab street. We who love our brothers and sisters in Israel/Palestine must warn them all as critical friends that marginalisation, discrimination and the use of force will not solve their problems. ...

Do Her Majesty's Government accept that decades of occupation of the Palestinian territories have poisoned the well and contributed to the current violence? At what point will Her Majesty's Government consider that the occupation had become after decades a de facto annexation? ...

col 646 Lord Pearson of Rannoch (Non-affiliated): ... The Government's central belief is that Islam is a religion of peace, of which Islamism is an aberration. In this they misunderstand Islam, which requires its followers to obey the Koran and to follow what Muhammad did and said. ... But the Koran contains a large number of verses which instruct Muslims to kill the Kaffir, or non-Muslims, and not to mingle with them. ...

We must not forget that our Muslim population is growing 10 times faster than the rest of us so that, in 10 years' time, on current trends, at least 10 of our local authorities will have

Muslim majorities ...

[The Government] could require that all teaching in our mosques and madrassas is in English, so that we begin to understand what version of Islam is being taught to our Muslims and their children. Secondly, they could send home to their countries of origin all our imams who cannot speak English. ...

col 647 Baroness Warsi (Conservative): ... We have a policy of a two-state solution, but we do not recognise Palestine as a state. Ministers refuse even to use its name. We have a policy of a peace process, but no appetite to initiate or prioritise one. We have a policy that settlement-building is illegal and contrary to international law, yet there is no consequence when, every year, more and more settlers supported by the Israeli Government and diaspora groups occupy more land in Palestine. We do nothing to deter Israel from expanding settlements, forced evictions and home demolitions. This is ethnic cleansing and it is denying the reality that the state of Palestine even exists.

Our policy is that east Jerusalem is an integral part of a future Palestinian state, yet we do nothing as extremists barge into homes, terrorising Palestinian families who have lived there for generations. Our policy is to defend human rights, but no action follows as hundreds of Palestinian children every year are arrested, mistreated and incarcerated. Our policy is to support international accountability and fund the International Criminal Court, but we oppose the ICC's investigations into war crimes in Palestine. Each time that we fail to implement our own policy, we send out the message to an ever-extremist right-wing Israeli Government that there will be no cost of consequences for their treatment of the Palestinians. This total impunity is feeding Israel's prolific rise in far-right extremism, leaving a society fighting for its soul. ...

col 648 We know about the dispossessions in Sheikh Jarrah, the chants of "Death to Arabs" in Jerusalem, the attacks on worshippers in Al-Aqsa and the attacks outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. ... These two peoples are in the same land, but with differing legal systems and even separate roads to the same place, so we know, as it is documented by Human Rights Watch, that the threshold for the international war crime of apartheid and persecution has been passed. ...

We know that generations have existed under a blockade, have never left Gaza ... and drink water that the World Health Organization says is not even fit for animals. We know that mid-pandemic, Gaza's only coronavirus testing lab was damaged by Israeli army bombing. We know of the deliberate targeting of journalists ...

We know from Amnesty International of the rising death toll in Gaza, with entire families wiped out in attacks that will be tried as war crimes. We know from the UN of the mounting destruction by Israeli strikes of homes, hospitals, libraries and charities, and we know about the incitement of hatred on official Israeli government platforms ... We know that there will be zero accountability for this appalling violence.

Our silence in the face of this makes our position, as I said when I resigned in 2014, morally indefensible. I ask the Government to acknowledge that they know. We all know. I urge the Government to stop responding to narrow political interests and to listen to the Israelis and Palestinians who stand together to call for an end to occupation, to Israeli Jewish human rights organisations, such as B'Tselem, and to the Israeli ex-soldiers who are breaking their silence and in the face of horrendous abuse continue to speak the truth and to point out how there is no military solution. ...

col 650 Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (Liberal Democrat): ... I deeply regret the loss of life caused by the military action against Hamas, but also condemn the 3,750 rockets launched in the last few days against Israeli citizens, Jew and Arab alike. I am appalled by the street violence in Israel, which has affected Israel's citizens—again, Jew and Arab alike. It is utterly shameful and is most certainly not a Jewish way to respond to any situation. ...

There is, again, talk of the creation of a state of Palestine ... I ask our Government to help create a stable state, which looks difficult to build on with the main players being President Abbas or the Palestinian Authority and Hamas and Islamic Jihad. ... Israel must feel

assured that it is not creating a belligerent enemy on its borders. ...

col 651 We must not defer action, as has happened in the past. A very vivid picture has been painted of the plight of Palestinians, and quite rightly so, but very few people remember that this is a very complex situation in the Middle East. Where is the reference to the 800,000 Jews who fled Arab lands, the hundreds of thousands who lived in Iraq and Syria and are no longer there at all? This is not a simplistic situation; it is a movement of populations, and both sides have suffered. ...

col 655 Lord Hussain (Liberal Democrat): ... As Her Majesty was making this speech, Palestinians were under intense bombardment and shelling by Israeli forces for the third day running, following the eviction of Palestinian families in east Jerusalem ...

On 8 May, the BBC reported that at least 163 Palestinian civilians and six Israeli police officers had been hurt in clashes in Jerusalem. Most were injured at the al-Aqsa mosque, where Israeli police fired rubber bullets and stun grenades at peaceful worshippers. ...

col 656 Israel is at full-scale war with one of the world's poorest and most impoverished countries—it has no military, bomb shelters or anywhere to hide. Israel has blocked Gaza from the outside world by land, sea and air. ...

Israel has closed off all crossing points for goods and people into Gaza since 10 May. Since Israel remains the occupying power in Gaza, it has the legal responsibility for the humanitarian crisis there. Will the Minister join me in demanding that Israel ensures full continued access for humanitarian goods and personnel?

I hope noble Lords agree that the extent of the expansion of illegal settlements in east Jerusalem, the forced eviction of Palestinian families from their homes, the brutality against civilians, the bombing of hospitals and Covid test centres and the halting of aid deliveries does not in any dictionary constitute Israel's right to defend itself. ...

I attended one of those protests in London side by side with some members of the British Jewish community in solidarity with the Palestinian people, who condemned the Israeli Government's actions and reiterated that this has no place in their faith—or any other faith, for that matter; this is not about religion. ...

col 658 Lord Walney (Non-affiliated): ... I also express my real discomfort at the way that many are choosing to discuss the Israel/Hamas conflict that is continuing to unfold. Much of the commentary from people in positions of influence and responsibility, including disproportionately from members of my former party, implies an equal legitimacy between the armed forces of the democratic state of Israel and the Islamist terror organisation that is dedicated to murdering Jews and wiping Israel off the map. Hamas deliberately embeds its forces in the densest civilian areas in Gaza and its rockets are targeted to maximise civilian casualties. Both of these are clear war crimes. Commentators imply that Israel is less legitimate because it has—thank God—developed the means to defend itself from many, though sadly not all, of the rockets raining down on its cities. We then hear some of the same voices having the hutzpah to express shock at the sickening anti-Semitic violence and harassment unleashed on British streets—anti-Semitism which they themselves have fanned. We all have a responsibility here, and I am afraid to say that Labour is, unfortunately, showing that it still has a long way to go to get its house in order after the rampant anti-Jewish racism of the Corbyn years. ...

col 662 Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat): ... Can the Minister clearly confirm that we regard settlement activity as illegal and that Israel is an occupying power in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, and has duties as a result which do not include removing people from their homes? Will he confirm that we will not move our embassy to Jerusalem and that Jerusalem needs to be the shared capital of Israel and the Palestinian state? Will he acknowledge that there is an inequality of power between occupied peoples and a state and that the world must be far more proactive in seeking a solution in the interests of both the Palestinians and the Israelis? The intercommunal conflict in Israel is a chilling warning and I would like the Minister to say at last that the UK accepts that it is now the right time

to recognise Palestine, as almost 140 other countries now do. I think we will hear the tired old formulation “When the time is right”—and it never is. ...

col 670 The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon): ... I come to the important issue of the Middle East and the current situation on the ground in Israel and Palestine. Of course we deplore the continuing cycle of violence; we have been at the forefront of stating this at the UN Security Council. ... we will stand up and speak out strongly against anti-Semitism. Anyone who seeks to target any community in the United Kingdom should be called out: anti-Semitism has no place in the UK—indeed, no faith should be targeted, across the United Kingdom. ... we have called for an immediate ceasefire in this conflict. ... the United Kingdom’s position has not changed. Settlements are illegal, and the only way to resolve this—for the long term, for a sustainable, peaceful solution—is a secure, safe Israel, living side by side with an independent, sovereign Palestinian state. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-05-19/debates/A14BD90D-6E0D-451E-8E92-DEF39C645EFD/Queen%E2%80%99SSpeech>

The question about the Durban Conference, referred to above by Lord Polak, can be read at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-04-22/debates/2B604EC1-AF4E-47D4-BC07-DB90C30C913E/IntegratedReviewOfSecurityDefenceDevelopmentAndForeignPolicy#contribution-D05DC956-3CEC-4044-A4DA-AA72067215AE>

The open letter from the Home Secretary and Communities Secretary, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.thejc.com/an-open-letter-to-the-jewish-community-1.516805>

Lord Shinkwin’s letter, referred to above, can be read (5th down) at

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2021/05/18/letterscovid-variants-governments-excuse-endless-micromanaging/>

House of Commons Oral Answers

Israel and Gaza: Ceasefire

col 701 Wayne David (Labour) To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if he will make a statement on the UK Government’s efforts to secure a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza.

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (James Cleverly): Since I was last at the Dispatch Box on 13 May, we have sadly seen further violence and more civilian deaths. I am sure the House will join me in offering condolences to all the families of those civilians who have been killed or injured across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Mr Speaker, with your permission I will set out to the House the work that the Government are doing, along with others, to bring about a peaceful resolution. We are urging the parties to work with mediators towards an immediate ceasefire to prevent further loss of life and a worsening humanitarian situation. We are supporting United Nations, Egyptian and Qatari efforts to that end, and we work closely with the United States.

We are also prioritising our own diplomatic efforts through both bilateral and multilateral channels. The Foreign Secretary and I, with the support of our diplomats on the ground, have been working to progress the conditions needed for an immediate ceasefire. The Foreign Secretary has spoken in recent days with the Israeli Foreign Minister and the Palestinian Prime Minister; he reinforced our clear message of de-escalation and our desire to work together to end the violence. I delivered similar messages to the Israeli ambassador and the Palestinian head of

mission in London.

We have also engaged regional partners at ministerial level. The Foreign Secretary spoke with the Foreign Minister of Jordan on 17 May and just this morning I spoke with a number of ambassadors from Arab states to reiterate the need for an immediate ceasefire, and I underlined our shared goal of a peaceful two-state solution. We are playing a leadership role in the United Nations Security Council, where we are calling for measures by all sides to reduce further violence. We will participate in the emergency UN General Assembly session later this week.

The UK unequivocally condemns the firing of rockets at Jerusalem and other locations within Israel. We strongly condemn these acts of terrorism by Hamas and other terrorist groups, who must permanently end their incitement and rocket fire against Israel. There is no justification for the targeting of civilians.

Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence and to defend its citizens from attack. In doing so, it is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with international humanitarian law and make every effort to avoid civilian casualties. We are aware of medical institutions, a number of schools and many homes in Gaza that have been destroyed or seriously damaged, and we are concerned that buildings housing media and humanitarian organisations such as Qatar Red Crescent have been destroyed. We call on Israel to adhere to the principles of necessity and proportionality when defending its legitimate security interests.

col 702 We are also concerned by reports that Hamas is once again using civilian infrastructure and populations as a cover for its military operations. Humanitarian access is essential, and we urge all parties to allow the unimpeded entry of vital humanitarian supplies. Hamas and other terrorist groups must cease their mortar attacks on these crossings. We urge all parties to work together to reduce tensions in the west bank, including East Jerusalem. The UK is clear that the historic status quo in Jerusalem must be respected. Violence against peaceful worshippers of any faith is unacceptable.

The UK position on evictions, demolitions and settlements is clear and long-standing: we oppose these activities. We urge the Government of Israel to cease their policies related to settlement expansion immediately and instead work towards a two-state solution. The UK will continue our intensive diplomatic efforts in the region focused on securing a ceasefire and creating the conditions for a sustainable peace. ...

Wayne David: It is of enormous concern to everyone in the House that in this conflict between Hamas and Israel nearly 300 people have been killed, including 65 children. This is truly appalling. We condemn the rocket attacks by Hamas and the Israeli airstrikes, which have killed so many innocent people and severely damaged schools and medical facilities. ...

I ask the Minister whether he would care to elaborate on what representations he has recently made to secure the objective of an immediate ceasefire. Could I also press him on what efforts his Government are making to provide humanitarian support for the people of Gaza? ... we need a process that will uphold international law, end the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories and create a viable Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

James Cleverly: ... Some of the diplomatic efforts are done, quite rightly, very visibly through institutions such as the United Nations. Some... are perhaps done more discreetly and quietly. The international community is pulling together, both in the region and in Europe and the United States, to try to bring about a meaningful ceasefire and work towards what can only be the right way of bringing permanent peace to the region, which is through negotiated political means.

col 703 **Theresa Villiers (Conservative):** Israel has the right to defend its citizens from terrorist attack, and I welcome the Minister's strong confirmation of that this morning. Will he go further, however, and send a message about terrorism by proscribing the whole of

Hamas as well as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is making possible these horrific rocket attacks?

James Cleverly: ... the military wing of Hamas is recognised internationally as a terrorist organisation, and the entirety of Hamas has no contact—we have a no-contact policy—from the UK Government. We enjoy good working relationships with the leadership of the Palestinian Authority. ...

Chris Law (SNP): ... The SNP abhors all indiscriminate violence against civilians so, first, what further steps can the UK Government take in demanding an immediate ceasefire? I am incredibly proud that last month my city of Dundee voted to recognise Palestine as a nation state so, secondly, will the UK Government commit today to recognising Palestine as an equal and independent nation state?

The UN Secretary-General has accused the Israeli Government of acting contrary to their obligations under human rights law. Indeed, Amnesty International has highlighted potential war crime by both Israel and Hamas, so, thirdly, what pressures are the UK Government bringing to bear to investigate these shocking breaches? Lastly, UK arms export licences to Israel have increased by over 1,000% in the past two years. This is not neutrality, so, finally, will the UK Government immediately suspend those exports until they have been thoroughly examined?

James Cleverly: I urge the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have a huge amount of respect, not to equate the legitimate Government of Israel with a terrorist organisation—the military wing of Hamas. ... Israel has a right to self-defence, but we have made it clear that we expect at all times for it to exercise that in accordance with international humanitarian law, and make every effort to minimise casualties. ...

col 704 **Robert Halfon (Conservative):** Reports indicate that at least 500 Hamas rockets—one in seven of the total number fired—have exploded within Gaza. A Palestinian non-governmental organisation has confirmed that eight Palestinians were killed last week by a rocket that fell short. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Hamas rocket fire not only threatens Israelis, but causes grave harm to ordinary Gazans and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms? Would he also acknowledge that, far from being able to negotiate with a democratic Palestinian Government, Israel is facing existential threats from Hamas and Hezbollah, extreme Islamist terrorist organisations funded and backed by Iran, and that there should be no moral equivalence between democratic Israel and the terrorism of Hamas and Hezbollah?

James Cleverly: The UK enjoys good relations with both the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. I urge all Members of the House and those further afield to recognise that Hamas, the military wing of which is recognised as a terrorist organisation, is no friend of the Palestinian people. ...

Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat): ... We need a ceasefire. The UK should not have left it to France to be the main sponsor of a UN resolution calling for it. This Government are shirking their historic responsibility and it is time to step up. Today, I wear my keffiyeh in recognition that if we want lasting peace, we cannot go back to how things were before ... If this Government are committed to a lasting peace, why do they not recognise the state of Palestine?

James Cleverly: ... Palestinian recognition is, rightly, an issue to be debated in this House, but at this point our focus is relentlessly on bringing about an immediate end to the conflict so that we can work in good time to a negotiated political solution and a two-state solution for the benefit of both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples. ...

col 705 **Rupa Huq (Labour):** ... Does [the Minister] agree with his two recent predecessors, Alistair Burt and Alan Duncan, that although UK Government policy is against illegal settlements and for a two-state solution, our long-standing lack of proactivity sometimes makes it look as if we do not really mean that? The only real victor in all this is

Netanyahu. Until recently he was a caretaker leader after an inconclusive election; he has now well cemented himself.

James Cleverly: The outcome of democratic elections in the state of Israel is for the Israeli people. We will continue to work with the Governments elected by the Israeli people. ...

Richard Burgon (Labour): How many more Palestinian children have to be killed? How many more Palestinian homes have to be reduced to rubble? How many more Palestinian schools and hospitals have to be bombed before the British Government take the action necessary to force the Israeli Government finally to stop their war on the Palestinian people? Surely now is the time for all UK weapons sales to Israel to be stopped. Surely now is the time for sanctions on the Israeli Government ... Surely now is the time ... to recognise the state of Palestine, because Palestine has the right to exist.

col 706 **James Cleverly:** I remind the hon. Gentleman of the sequencing of the events that unfolded in Gaza and Israel. Israel's actions were in response to indiscriminate rocket attacks from an internationally recognised terrorist organisation. Israel has the right to self-defence. ...

Tobias Ellwood (Conservative): ... It is difficult to see how any tactical or strategic advantage could be gained by either side from continuing this conflict. Once we get to a ceasefire, the old legacy challenges will remain and Israel will require a partner to work with. My concern is that Palestinian elections have not taken place for about 16 years and Hamas is now supported by the Iranians. It has no interest in working with Fatah in the west bank, let alone the Israelis. Does my right hon. Friend agree that perhaps the neighbouring Muslim countries, particularly those that have just signed the Abraham accords, could be invited to help to encourage Palestinians to hold fresh elections, so that we get more representative voices that Israel can work with?

James Cleverly: ... The UK has been fully supportive of elections for the Palestinian Authority, which are now well overdue. We have seen on numerous occasions the Palestinian Authority working and co-ordinating with the Government of Israel, and we are always supportive when that is the case. The actions taken by Hamas are not to the benefit of the Palestinian people. ...

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... [the Minister] knows that Hamas is trying to make the Palestinian Authority and Mahmoud Abbas redundant, to make him appear irrelevant and to present itself as the ultimate defender of Jerusalem and al-Aqsa. ... Will the Minister take the opportunity today to tell Hamas that the British Government will never do business with terrorists?

James Cleverly: ... Ultimately, the future of the Palestinian people should lie in the hands of people who are able to negotiate on the international stage, and Hamas is not in a position to credibly do that. ...

col 707 **Jeremy Corbyn (Labour):** The images of death, destruction and loss of life all over the region are horrific. The targeted bombing of buildings in Gaza, the tanks on the west bank, and the destruction of education and health facilities is absolutely appalling. Will the Minister explain exactly what is the nature of Britain's military relationship with Israel? What is the nature of that co-operation with Israel? Can he tell the House whether any munitions sold by Britain to Israel have been used to bomb places in Gaza, and whether any drone equipment supplied by Britain or bought by Britain has been used as a surveillance method on either the west bank or Gaza and followed up by the destruction of civilian life and the death of many people, including the tragedy of the deaths of whole families and children? Our public need to know exactly the nature of that military relationship with Israel. Of course, the Minister rightly says that the occupied territories, which are occupied by Israel, are the places that suffer as a result of this bombardment.

James Cleverly: The UK has a robust arms export licensing regime, and all export licences are assessed in accordance with it. ... I would also remind him that Israel is responding to rockets fired at it from an organisation closely associated with Iran.

We would urge all nations to take their arms export responsibilities as seriously as the UK does. ...

col 708 Diane Abbott (Labour): The Minister will be aware that, around the world, people want to see an end to the violence and the rising death toll ... However, does he also accept that the long-term solution to these issues lies with the UK Government, among others, demanding an end to forced evictions of Palestinians in East Jerusalem; the UK Government insisting that sacred sites, including the al-Aqsa mosque, are treated with the utmost respect; the UK Government asking for an immediate halt to new settlements and an adherence to international law; and the UK Government recognising Palestine as a state, with full membership of the United Nations? ... when will justice for the Palestinians be an issue?

James Cleverly: Let me read verbatim a section from my opening speech. I said: "The UK position on evictions, demolitions and settlements is clear and long-standing: we oppose these activities. We urge the Government of Israel to cease their policies related to settlement expansion immediately and instead work towards a two-state solution." So our position on the very questions that the right hon. Lady raised is clear and long standing ...

Andrew Murrison (Conservative): ... Long-range rockets at scale are not possible without the involvement of a sophisticated, malign state actor that will never be content until the state of Israel is driven into the sea. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there will never be peace in the Levant, never be a two-state solution and never be a solution of any sort until Iran ceases to be a feral bandit state ...

James Cleverly: ... I have already said that the UK encourages Iran to be a more thoughtful and less disruptive regional player and to stop arming and supporting terrorist militia groups in the region. ...

Philippa Whitford (SNP): Gaza has been under a suffocating blockade for almost 15 years, which already undermines the delivery of healthcare. Having been involved in breast cancer projects in Gaza for many years, I am aware from colleagues that 14 Government hospitals and clinics, including the covid laboratory, have been bombed, along with those run by international charities. ...

col 709 James Cleverly: ... We are aware of the reports and, indeed, footage of medical facilities that have been damaged or destroyed, but we are also deeply concerned about the continued use by Hamas of civilian infrastructure for its military operations. ...

Mary Robinson (Conservative): Hamas has consistently chosen to prioritise its goal of the destruction of Israel over the safety and prosperity of Palestinians, but in conflict it is always the innocent, Palestinians and Israelis, who suffer. That must end and a ceasefire must be agreed. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we cannot just condemn Hamas, but must ensure that moderate Palestinians' representatives are supported and championed?

James Cleverly: ... we seek, as does the international community, a peaceful life for the Palestinian people and for the Israeli people. That can be done only through international co-operation, and ultimately it has to be done by representatives of the Palestinian people who respect Israel's right to exist.

Chris Bryant (Labour): ... is it not profoundly unhelpful for us to take a side? If we are going to take a side, would it not make far more sense for us to be on the side of the families who have been fleeing rocket attacks from Hamas, of the families who have been evicted in East Jerusalem or in the illegal settlements, and of the doctors who have seen their facilities bombed or who do not have any vaccines to be able to deal with coronavirus? ...

James Cleverly: ... It is perhaps seductive but ultimately futile to work to reinforce a side of an argument while an argument persists. What we should do is seek to end arguments, end conflict, pursue peace and pursue the right of Palestinians and

Israelis to live in peace, side by side, in harmony and prosperity. ...

Andy Slaughter (Labour): The Minister says he has a policy on evictions and demolitions in East Jerusalem and the west bank, on the attacks on al-Aqsa and the expansions of settlements, but the illegal settlement and occupation of Palestinian territories has been going on for more than five decades. What is the Minister actually going to do to tackle the causes of violence? ...

col 710 **James Cleverly:** ... If it were simple and easy, it would have been done. ...

Jacob Young (Conservative): ... We have all seen the images of what is happening in Israel and the Gaza strip, and I have to say thank god for the Iron Dome. Were it not for that outstanding piece of Israeli technology, today we would see thousands of innocent Israeli citizens dead and maimed at the hands of Hamas terrorists and no doubt even worse conflict in the region. ...

James Cleverly: ... There are plenty of thoughtful and passionate Palestinians and Israelis who are determined to bring peace to the region, and we must ensure that their voices are heard. ...

Munira Wilson (Liberal Democrat): ... The UK Government are absolutely right to condemn Hamas's rocket attacks, but they must also condemn in much stronger terms the completely disproportionate response from the Israeli Government, which has resulted in the loss of hundreds of civilian lives ... coming on the back of sustained breaches of international law for many years. ...

James Cleverly: I have already made clear our desire to see an immediate end to the hostilities, a permanent ceasefire and a negotiated settlement between the Palestinians and the Israelis. We have also urged that, in their response to rocket attacks from within civilian infrastructure in Gaza, the Israelis exercise all caution to minimise civilian casualties. ...

Greg Smith (Conservative): Yesterday, Israel facilitated dozens of trucks filled with humanitarian aid, including field hospitals and covid vaccines, to enter Gaza, yet Hamas deliberately fired repeat barrages of mortars at the Israeli crossing terminal, injuring an Israel Defence Forces soldier involved in the aid transfer and killing two foreign workers nearby. Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning that appalling incident, which shows, as he stated earlier, that the actions of Hamas are categorically not in the interests of Palestinian people?

col 711 **James Cleverly:** ... As I said in my initial response, the targeting of civilians is unacceptable, and the specific targeting of humanitarian support particularly so. I have urged Hamas and other terrorist organisations to cease their targeting of humanitarian access routes ...

Liam Byrne (Labour): We heard the Minister's statement of policy; we just do not understand the strategy for advancing it. He has to realise, like the rest of us, that there is no peace without justice. The way to disarm Hamas, to make progress towards peace and to ensure genuine calm and de-escalation can only be through the full realisation of Palestinian rights and the end of systematic discrimination against Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. ...

James Cleverly: ... there can be no legitimisation of indiscriminate rocket attacks against civilian targets from within civilian infrastructure by an internationally recognised terrorist organisation.

Mark Harper (Conservative): ... it is clear that Hamas has no interest in dialogue and moving towards peace. What can we do to strengthen the Palestinian Authority, which is a credible partner for peace, and to reduce the influence of Iran, which is trying to strengthen the hand of those who are Israel's enemies and who do not wish to see peace for the Palestinians?

James Cleverly: ... The Palestinian people have many friends and allies in the international community and they have people within their own leadership who are determined to bring about peace and see a peaceful two-state solution. We should

find ways of strengthening their voices and their hands and work with them in pursuit of a two-state solution. There are also people who claim leadership or who aspire to leadership who will never accept the existence of an Israeli state, and we cannot, will not and should not work with them.

col 712 Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour): The nub of this issue ... is a colonial-era mindset of a gradual land grab: the forcible eviction of people from their homes; the building of illegal settlements; the extreme and shameless violation of human rights and international law; and the sheer suppression and humiliation of an entire nation. ... exactly how much aid have we managed to get through to the inhumanely blockaded Gaza?

James Cleverly: ... The UK remains one of the most generous donors of humanitarian support to the Palestinian people ... I am not able to give him an accurate assessment, as humanitarian access routes have been closed because of their targeting by Hamas, but we will continue to pursue the joint aims of bringing about a conclusion to this conflict and ensuring that humanitarian support reaches the people who need it.

Bob Blackman (Conservative): Reports emerged yesterday that Hamas had launched a torpedo at Israel's natural gas field in the Mediterranean and that an armed unmanned aerial vehicle caused an explosion at Israel's Ashkelon power station. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Hamas's ability to acquire these non-conventional weapons is a very worrying development? ...

James Cleverly: I am not able to confirm the reports to which my hon. Friend referred, but I reinforce the points that I made about the need for Iran not to be a destabilising influence in the region ...

col 713 Christian Wakeford: Of Hamas's many deplorable aspects, its cynical locating of military infrastructure within densely populated civilian areas is perhaps the worst. This was confirmed again yesterday, as Hamas was found to be launching rockets close to a school. Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning this double war crime?

James Cleverly: ... The location of military activities within civilian infrastructure is completely unacceptable and demonstrates a disturbing attitude towards the lives of the Palestinians that the leadership of Hamas claim to be defending.

Caroline Lucas (Green): ... While I welcome the Government's long-term focus on peace and the two-state solution, can the Minister tell us specifically what consequences the UK is advocating to the international community to deal with Israel's illegal actions? ...

James Cleverly: ... We will continue to work with friends in the international community to seek peace in the region.

Andrew Percy (Conservative): Yet again, we see the distasteful spectacle in this place of a pile-on against the democratic state that is under attack from terrorism, while those who hide their murder weapons among children and civilians are given a near-free pass. It is that, and the misinformation circulating from certain groups with regard to access to religious sites, which is directly contributing to the rising hate against some in this country and what we saw on the streets of London this weekend. Will my right hon. Friend call out all those who spread this misinformation?

James Cleverly: ... we all have a duty to speak carefully to ensure that what we say is accurate. On my hon. Friend's point about some of the scenes that we saw in London and elsewhere over the weekend, the people who would seek any excuse to perpetrate antisemitic attacks or to say antisemitic things should not be given any justification, whether it be from Members of this House or anywhere else. ...

col 714 Matthew Offord (Conservative): ... the reality is that there will be further rounds of fighting unless the international community ends Iran's bankrolling and arming of Gaza-based terrorist groups such as Hamas. Some Members today appear to be defending the actions of that terrorist group. ... can my right hon. Friend outline how the P5+1 intend finally to end Iran's ability to fuel conflict in the region?

James Cleverly: ... in addition to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, a priority is for it to cease its destabilising actions in the region. ...

Stephen Timms (Labour): Large numbers of people gather at the al-Aqsa mosque to pray. Does the Minister agree that the attacks that we saw on people praying there, and the large number of civilian casualties that resulted, cannot be justified? ...

col 715 **James Cleverly:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the ability of the faithful to worship and the importance of the status quo of the holy sites of all religions in Jerusalem. It is the UK Government's explicit policy that those holy sites need to be protected, and that worshippers should be able to worship in peace and confidence. ...

Jerome Mayhew (Conservative): I am very glad that my right hon. Friend has made it absolutely clear today that the current situation was provoked by Hamas firing rockets into Israel, and that Israel has the absolute right to defend itself. ... We have to accept, do we not, that the continued building of illegal settlements makes that two-state solution ever harder to achieve? What steps can the Government take to dissuade Israel from this policy?

James Cleverly: ... The UK's position is that continued settlement expansion does make a sustainable two-state solution more difficult, and that is why we have been opposed to that and have communicated our opposition to that to the Israeli Government. ...

Dave Doogan (SNP): The UK Government previously halted military export licences to the Israeli defence forces after the attacks in Gaza in 2014, but since 2015 there have followed £400 million of licences to Israel from the UK to date. There exists a profound asymmetry to this conflict, evidenced by the appalling civilian death toll in each territory, with almost 200 Palestinian civilians and 10 Israeli civilians killed—all victims; all wasted lives. Is the UK content to uphold that asymmetry with continued military sales, or will it promote de-escalation dynamically, with renewed limits on military exports to Israel?

col 716 **James Cleverly:** Israel seeks to defend itself against attacks from the military wing of Hamas, which is an internationally recognised terrorist organisation. Our military export licensing regime is very robust ...

Antony Higginbotham (Conservative): ... Securing a ceasefire will be very difficult, but maintaining it will be more difficult still, so can [the Minister] confirm that once that ceasefire has been secured, we will offer whatever support we can to the Palestinian Authority, so that they can hold free and fair elections, which are the only way that moderate voices can get into power and then take the country forward?

James Cleverly: ... A ceasefire to this conflict is the beginning of an incredibly important process, which will include ensuring that the Palestinian people have credible voices to speak on their behalf on the international stage, and that we work together—with the Israelis, the Palestinians and the international community—for the thing that we should all aim for, and which I believe the vast majority of people, both in this House and more broadly, seek to see, which is a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous two-state solution.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-05-19/debates/B3F55477-09D3-42A0-A2E8-27B9BB6014B4/IsraelAndGazaCeasefire>

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Zarah Sultana (Labour) [880] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the ICC enquiry into war crimes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

James Cleverly: The UK is a strong supporter of the ICC and we respect the independence of the Court and its officials. In this instance we do not consider that the ICC has jurisdiction. We continue to closely follow the ICC's work and are looking at the implications of this decision.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/880>

Jerusalem: Palestinians

Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru) [74] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made an assessment of the legality under international law of Israeli efforts to evict Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood.

James Cleverly: The UK regularly raises forced evictions of Palestinians from property with the Government of Israel. The Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to all occupied territories, prohibits demolitions or forced evictions absent military necessity. The UK is clear that in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, evictions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The practice causes unnecessary suffering to Palestinians and is harmful to efforts to promote peace.

I publicised on the 8 May outlining our concern over tensions in Jerusalem linked to the threatened eviction of Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah. The current threat to communities in Sheikh Jarrah is allayed for now. We continue to urge Israel to cease such actions. UK Officials at the British Embassy in Tel Aviv continue to raise the issue regularly with the Israeli Authorities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-11/74>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1391028309618839557>

Jerusalem: Palestinians

Zarah Sultana (Labour) [886] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Israeli counterpart on the displacement of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah.

James Cleverly: I publicised on 8 May outlining our concern over tensions in Jerusalem linked to the threatened eviction of Palestinian families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah. We continue to urge Israel to cease such actions, which in all but the most exceptional cases are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. I also spoke to the Israeli Ambassador and to the Palestinian Head of Mission in London to urge them to de-escalate, restore calm and reiterate our position on this issue. UK Officials at the British Embassy in Tel Aviv continue to raise the issue regularly with the Israeli Authorities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/886>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1391028309618839557>

Gaza: Israel

Lyn Brown (Labour) [656] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what estimate he has made of the number of deaths of (a) children, (b) non-combatant adults and (c) combatant adults in Gaza following military action by Israel beginning on 11 May 2021.

James Cleverly: The ongoing violence across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories is deeply concerning. Civilian deaths, both in Israel and Gaza are a tragedy. As the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have made clear, this cycle of violence must stop, and every effort must be made to avoid loss of life, especially

that of children.

The UK condemns the firing of rockets at civilian populations and we urge all parties to de-escalate immediately. Any attacks targeted against civilians are unlawful and unjustifiable. All countries, including Israel, have a legitimate right to self-defence, and the right to defend their citizens from attack. In doing so, it is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/656>

Israel: Gaza

Hilary Benn (Labour) [65] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to his Israeli counterpart on the reported civilian casualties resulting from the recent airstrikes on Gaza.

James Cleverly: The Foreign Secretary delivered a message of de-escalation in his calls to Israeli Foreign Minister Ashkenazi on 11 and 16 May, and to Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh on 12 May. I spoke to the Israeli Ambassador and Palestinian Head of Mission in London to urge them to de-escalate and restore calm. All countries, including Israel, have a legitimate right to self-defence, and the right to defend their citizens from attack. In doing so, it is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties. We continue to call upon Hamas and other terrorist groups to permanently end their incitement and rocket fire against Israel. Any attacks targeted against civilians are unlawful and unjustifiable. Our priority now must be an immediate de-escalation on all sides, and an end to the killing of civilians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-11/65>

Israel: Gaza

Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru) [73] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with (a) his Israeli counterparts, (b) Gazan authorities and (c) the Palestinian Authority to de-escalate and end the recent violence in that region.

James Cleverly: The Foreign Secretary delivered a message of de-escalation in his calls to Israeli Foreign Minister Ashkenazi on 11 and 16 May, and to Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh on 12 May. I spoke to the Israeli Ambassador and Palestinian Head of Mission in London to urge them to de-escalate and restore calm. We have also engaged Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Qatar and the UN to support their efforts to mediate. UK embassies throughout the Middle East are engaging regional partners, and we remain in close contact with the US administration and European allies. Our priority now must be an immediate de-escalation on all sides, and an end to the killing of civilians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-11/73>

Israel: Iran

Jim Shannon (DUP) [239] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with NATO on the recent attack on an Israeli vessel by Iran.

James Cleverly: The UK is committed to ensuring the safety of shipping and to maintaining the principle of freedom of navigation. Growing tensions around strategic maritime choke points threatens the ability of trade to safely pass through international waters. The UK continues to underline the need for a reduction in tensions on all sides. This incident has not been the subject of Ministerial discussion at NATO.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-11/239>

Scottish Parliament Motion

Anas Sarwar (Labour) [S6M-00054] Condemnation of Current Violence in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories – That the Parliament condemns all violence and the appalling loss of life in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories; calls on the Scottish Government, the UK Government and the UN to put pressure on Israel and Hamas for an immediate ceasefire; considers that, at the heart of this conflict, there is the ongoing illegal occupation, illegal settlement growth, illegal siege of Gaza and ongoing breaches of international law and human rights violations, all of which it believes must end with an immediate reconvening of meaningful peace talks conducted by a third-party interlocutor from the international community to deliver peace and justice; believes that any prospects of peace are fading fast and that the loss of hope would have devastating consequences; considers that Benjamin Netanyahu is currently a blockage to peace and that all possible pressure should be applied on him and his government to positively engage and act, and believes that there will only be justice when the State of Palestine is internationally recognised and when every Israeli life and every Palestinian life is seen as, and treated as, equal.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/votes-and-motions-search/S6M-00054>

European Parliament Debate

Note that only contributions in English have been abstracted below

EU strategy towards Israel-Palestine

Augusto Santos Silva, President-in-Office of the Council, on behalf of the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy ... for over a week we have been witnessing one of the worst upsurges in violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory for many years. The grave escalation in and around Gaza follows days of clashes in Jerusalem, including Haram al-Sharif / Temple Mount. We are particularly dismayed at the large numbers of civilian deaths and injuries, including children, be it the result of Israeli airstrikes in Gaza or of indiscriminate rocket attacks launched from Gaza. The fighting must stop. It must stop immediately. ...

The EU has condemned the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli civilians. It is unacceptable and must stop. We understand Israel is right to protect its civilian population. Nevertheless, we expect its response to be proportionate, with maximum restraint in the use of force.

The European Union is working in every way it can to end the hostilities and to support the mediation efforts of the United Nations, Egypt and others. ...

For everyone, the priority now must be immediate de-escalation in order to protect civilian lives. All sides must uphold international humanitarian law and provide for full humanitarian access, and all efforts should be directed at avoiding further civilian casualties and preventing the alarming loss of life we have seen thus far. ...

Many of us have strong views on the proximate causes of this latest conflict. Indeed, the events in Jerusalem during the recent period of the Muslim holy days have been alarming. We were deeply concerned by the clashes at Haram al-Sharif / Temple Mount. ...

The situation with regard to the eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah and other areas of East Jerusalem also remains of serious concern. It is vital that Israel does not allow them to be carried out. Such actions are illegal in international law and only fuel tensions on the ground. ...

... both Palestinians and Israelis alike deserve to live in safety and security, enjoying equal rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy. ... The violence must end right now.

David McAllister, on behalf of the PPE Group ... The rocket attacks by the terror organisation Hamas have no justification and put the lives of innocent people at great risk. They must stop immediately.

Israel has a right and Israel has a duty to defend its citizens against terror attacks. I call on the Israeli Government to act with restraint and to do its utmost to avoid civilian casualties. ... Meaningful direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians towards a long—lasting and fair agreement on the two—state solution based on the internationally agreed parameters need to restart. The European Union and the United States should cooperate closely together in the Middle East Quartet to create the conditions for renewed confidence between the two negotiating parties.

Finally, let me be very clear. Yes, one can criticise Israel's politics but there is no justification for anti-Semitism, hatred and violence, not on this continent and not in the European Union, which is committed to freedom of religion and human rights for all our citizens. Anti-Semitism in any form is unacceptable, anti-Semitic violence must be punished with the full force of law.

Pedro Marques, on behalf of the S&D Group ... We strongly condemn all acts of violence and call on both sides to avoid any further loss of lives, but we cannot forget the source of this new round of violence. It was the increasing number of demolitions, evictions and forced displacement of Palestinians, including in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. The right of Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace, security, freedom and democracy can only be achieved by the well—known two—state solution: the only viable vision for a just and lasting peace.

At the same time, both sides have to put their houses in order. Israel has to find a way out from its political crisis and certainly that situation is not helping in the current state of affairs in this conflict. Israel must also ensure equal rights for the Palestinian citizens of Israel, who face daily and systematic discrimination. Palestinians, from their side, have to restore their national unity as well as the democratic legitimacy of their political institutions through long-overdue legislative and presidential elections. ...

Jordi Solé, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group ... Even if there is a ceasefire in Gaza – which we call for – going back to the previous status, to business as usual, will only grant more instability because the real underlying problem is the deeply unjust situation on the ground, the situation that the international community largely refuses to recognise. ...

Charlie Weimers, on behalf of the ECR Group ... sirens wail, rocket attack is imminent, you have precious seconds to run for shelter. Millions of Israelis often face this reality. Would you tolerate thousands of rockets targeting your homes? Would you ignore calls glorifying terror attacks against your people? Would you accept an internationally recognised terror organisation attacking your democratic country?

If, Minister Santos Silva of the EU Presidency, your answer is yes to these questions, then God help us if Europe is ever attacked. If your answer is 'No, I would not stand for it', then, Minister, you're no better nor worse than Israel. You're normal. That is why we have to stand by Israel against terror groups which seek its annihilation. ...

Tonino Picula (S&D) ... Palestinians' right to self-determination requires intra-Palestinian reconciliation and unity. Long-overdue elections are a crucial step in this regard. As Palestinian citizens make up 20% of Israel's population, the current crisis is very much also an internal crisis within Israeli society.

Compromise ... is not a sign of weakness: quite the contrary. Two independent, democratically-consolidated sovereign states that will allow peaceful and secure co-existence of citizens on both sides of the border should be a solution we need to continue pursuing.

Michal Šimečka (Renew) ... this is indeed a tragically familiar pattern that we're seeing: a new eruption of violence, civilians dying every day and the international community struggling to contain the conflict. Now of course, Europe should denounce and condemn

Hamas terrorism and should support Israel's right to self-defence in line with international law, but let's also remember that Israel is by far the stronger side militarily and politically, and that elicits a moral and political responsibility for the protection of lives and for de-escalation ...

And there is no shortcut to peace and stability as some may have thought with the Abraham Accords, because these cycles of violence and terrorism will keep returning unless there is a just and lasting political settlement, one that addresses and alleviates the despair and suffering of the Palestinians and also allows for a viable democratic Palestinian state to coexist side by side with a secure Israel. ...

Reinhard Bütikofer (Verts/ALE) ... Israel has every right to defend itself against the indiscriminate terrorist attacks from Hamas. Europe has every obligation to strongly oppose any form of anti-Semitism that we unfortunately experience in this context again. ... We need new leadership on all sides, leadership able and willing to avoid actions that undermine a peaceful future, and that includes incitement, violent attacks, terrorist acts, evictions, demolitions and settlement construction east of the 1967 line. ...

Chris MacManus (The Left) ... during the debate, we will hear demands to stop the bombardment of civil areas, cease forced evictions, and for an end to the apartheid regime that Israel operates. But, frankly, the time for strong words is gone. What's required is determined action by the EU to recognise that this isn't two powerful opponents in conflict, but actually one military power crushing a nation making a stand for their right, as a sovereign people, to control their own destiny.

The European Council must stand up for international law and ban the entry of goods produced in the occupied territories by illegal settlers. I call on them to refer Israel to the International Criminal Court. *(Applause)* ...

Lukas Mandl (PPE) ... what we heard from the speaker just before me in this European Parliament is a bad example ... it's a misunderstanding that's happening on purpose. It's part of doubting the right of Israel to exist. It's part of doubting the right of Israel to defend itself.

First of all we have to take care of what's happening in the streets of Europe and we are facing anti-Semitism these days in the streets of Europe and we have to tackle it strongly ...

Let me remind you that when my own country, Austria, was attacked by terrorists in November last year, Israel was the very first state showing solidarity with Austria. And I am sure that Israel would have done the same with each and every other state which would be based on democracy and rule of law, as Israel itself is, and would be attacked from terrorists.

So now we stand with solidarity with Israel, and we should never forget about the question, who is the aggressor here and who defends itself? ...

Evin Incir (S&D) ... What is going on is nothing other than war crimes, and we must also dare to speak the truth. Only through once and for all ending the everyday annexation and five-decade-long occupation of Palestine will a lasting peace, where two states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace and security, be possible. Let us be clear: there is an occupying power here, namely Israel, who has a big responsibility to end the root cause for the sake of the Israeli and the Palestinian people. The EU and the EU's Member State, should, once and for all, recognise Palestine. ...

Željana Zovko (PPE) ... Civilians in Israel are being exposed to indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas and other terrorist groups. Israel has the right to self-defence in accordance with international law. Also, war crimes should be called war crimes. The worst war crime is the use of a human shield in order to gain public support. ... The spilling of blood calls, unfortunately, for more blood. ...

I strongly condemn the anti-Semitic behaviour that we are also witnessing along with this conflict on European soil. ...

Grace O'Sullivan (Verts/ALE) ... lives have been lost in a mismatched and brutal assault as the world stands on the sidelines watching the horror unfold. ...

Meanwhile the US approves weapon sales to Israel worth millions. In the EU many Member States give tacit approval to the disproportionate Israeli onslaughts by inaction and silence. ... We are failing the Palestinian people. ...

My home country of Ireland stands with the people of Palestine. The world should too, and it should do so with deeds as well as words. ...

Carmen Avram (S&D) ... The suffering endured by innocent people has to stop. This complex situation becomes even harder to solve as long as a notorious terrorist organisation is involved.

Hamas, included on the EU terrorism blacklist, only cares about itself and its power and control over the Palestinian population. Europe should condemn Hamas and Islamic Jihad for the deaths and devastation seen in Israel and in Gaza. Their only goal – to destroy the State of Israel – keeps the Middle East in a constant state of war, and Iran's involvement in financing the terrorist organisations attacking Israel is contributing to a very dangerous and bloody situation.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army, in its efforts to protect its own population, is doing its utmost to avoid harming Palestinian civilians, even warning them on cell phones ahead of military intervention. Unfortunately this still isn't enough to avoid the loss of Palestinian civilians' lives. Hamas and Islamic Jihad commit the double war crime of murdering Israeli civilians and using the Palestinians as human shields. The root causes of this conflict are complex, but as long as the terrorist organisations are not dismantled, peace, democracy and economic development in the Palestinian territories are unachievable. ...

To read the full transcript see

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2021-05-18-ITM-010_EN.html

TOP

Foreign Affairs

See the Lords debate on the Queen's Speech, included in the Israel section above.

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2867>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS) (closing date 30 June 2021)

<https://evensurvey.co.uk/>

Protect Duty (closing date 2 July 2021)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/protect-duty>

Social Distance, Digital Congregation: British Ritual Innovation under COVID-19

(closing date not stated)

<https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk/take-the-survey/>

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438