



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Holocaust

Israel

Foreign Affairs

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

SCoJeC is incurring significant extra costs as a result of the war in Israel and Gaza, including in production of this digest. Please help us maintain these resources by donating at

www.scojec.org/donate.html

Thank you very much for your support.



Home Affairs

Westminster Hall Debate

Antisemitic Offences

col 33WH Nicola Richards (Conservative): ... I will begin by reminding colleagues that 7 October saw the biggest loss of Jewish life in a single day since the holocaust. The number of Jewish people currently displaced within Israel is the largest since the holocaust. In response to this, antisemitic incidents worldwide have soared.

Since 7 October, Auschwitz-Birkenau has been called an “embarrassment to humanity”. “Heil Hitler” has been shouted at Jewish students in the UK. Protests have included shouts to “burn the Jews” on the streets of London. The hats of Jewish men have been thrown off them in our capital, and menorahs have been attacked. We have seen threats from a professor to blow up the Jewish Labour Movement conference. University societies have championed “the resistance”, glorified Palestinian “martyrs” and denied the murder and rape of Israelis at Nova music festival. Synagogues have been targeted and threatened, Jewish schools have been attacked, and Jewish businesses have been vandalised.

In Bristol, “Free Palestine” was shouted at visibly Jewish men walking to a Sabbath lunch. In Leeds, a Jewish university footballer was called a “big nose Jew” by a member of the opposing team. In Manchester, a Jewish school was sent a letter saying “warning your school is being targeted, No one is safe, no one should support killers, Palestine forever”. In London, the Wiener Holocaust Library ... had “Gaza” spray-painted on its sign. In my

area of the west midlands, a swastika was painted on a bridge, and a curry house announced its full support of Hamas. ...

That is by no means an exhaustive list; rather it is just a small insight to the Jewish experience in Britain over the last few months. Dr Dave Rich of the Community Security Trust describes antisemitism as a “light sleeper lying just beneath the surface of society, ready to raise its head whenever the opportunity arises”.

These worrying statistics make clear the disturbing reality of the current situation.

Gregory Campbell (DUP): ... Does she agree that there is not much that unites the far right and the hard left, but what does seem to unite them—for whatever reason that mystifies me, and possibly her as well—is their innate hatred of Jewish people?

col 34WH **Nicola Richards:** The hon. Member is of course right.

Around the world, we have also seen arson attacks on synagogues in Germany, Tunisia and Armenia. In Canada, Jewish buildings were firebombed and Jewish religious schools were shot at. Terrorist plots against Jewish targets have been foiled in Germany, Cyprus, Denmark, the Netherlands and Brazil. Israeli flags were burnt outside synagogues in Spain and Sweden. In Vienna, part of the Jewish cemetery was set alight and swastikas were painted on walls. Jewish homes were marked by antisemitic graffiti in Paris and Berlin. In the US, a man fired shots outside a synagogue, and declared “Free Palestine” to the police who arrested him. In Russia, a mob stormed an airport looking for Jewish passengers to attack. A Jewish American, Paul Kessler, was killed by a pro-Palestinian protester in Los Angeles. A holocaust memorial in Berlin was defaced.

Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat): ... Does she share my concern that so much of the work done in this country by the CST and Tell MAMA to build bridges and understanding is being undermined ... Does she share my fear that there are people up and down this country—students, schoolchildren and the elderly—living in fear in a way that we never envisaged in this century?

Nicola Richards: The hon. Lady is right. We see some great examples of communities working together. A few months ago, I visited the Jewish community in Birmingham, who told us about the support they had had from the mosque in Birmingham and faith leaders across the board. ...

Across the UK, in the days following Hamas’s barbaric massacre on 7 October to 13 December, the Community Security Trust recorded 2,098 antisemitic incidents. That figure is expected to rise and 2023 is expected to be the year in which the highest ever number of antisemitic incidents was recorded in the UK. ... To clarify, that is 2,098 incidents of antisemitism as a result of a massacre of innocent Jewish men, women and children in Israel. The impact of this is massive and should not be underestimated.

Whereas the police require only for victims to say that they have been the target of a hate crime, the CST requires evidence of antisemitism. The CST logged at least another 1,288 incidents, which have not been classed as antisemitic. Those include criminal acts affecting Jewish people and property, suspicious behaviour near Jewish locations and anti-Israel activity that is not directed at the Jewish community or does not use antisemitic language. ...

The 2,098 incidents included hateful comments, threats of violence and death threats. Among them were 95 assaults, 165 direct threats, 127 instances of damage and desecration of Jewish property, and 1,677 incidents of abusive behaviour. One hundred and thirty-three incidents related to schools and included the abuse of schoolchildren and teachers ...

col 35WH Rallies have taken place across our nation weekly. Of course people have a legitimate right to protest, but that is not the same as feeling free to support terrorist groups or attack Jewish people. ...

Dr Rich explained [to the Home Affairs Committee] that 7 October left the Jewish community in the UK “completely traumatised and grief-stricken”. He explained that within

24 hours of that largest murderous assault on Jews since the holocaust, the first pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel demonstrations were beginning—some of them while the attack was still continuing. ... The CST has had impact statements from British Jews explaining that they feel unsafe living in this country and are changing dates of hospital appointments, forbidding their children to get on the train, and so on.

There have been some 300 arrests at protests ... There have been antisemitic placards and expressions of support for terrorism, which the organisers are not doing enough to stamp out. ...

Social media platforms must act too. ... the companies are failing in their duty of care to the users. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue found a fifty-fold increase in antisemitic comments on YouTube immediately after the 7 October attack. It found a major rise in threats made against Jewish institutions and individuals, as well as posts on X supporting and glorifying Hamas's terror attacks. By 12 October, this content had been viewed more than 16 million times on the platform. ... There are two antisemitic tweets for every Jewish person in the UK per year on X. ...

col 36WH Since the 7 October attacks, antisemitism on campus has risen sixfold, with 157 recorded incidents according to the CST. Jewish students have been the victims of death threats, physical assaults and violent abuse. There has been explicit support for Hamas and calls for an intifada. The Union of Jewish Students has provided examples, including a student in Scotland being pelted with eggs, graffiti on a poster in Manchester encouraging students to kill more Jews, and participants in an online lecture at Queen Mary University of London joking about Hitler's gas bill and about getting a Hitler reboot card. The result is that some students remove visible signs of their Jewish identity, while others simply avoid campus altogether. ...

John Spellar (Labour): ... Free speech and discussion is vital in a democratic society but, in the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes of the US Supreme Court, it is not "the right to shout fire in a crowded theatre". Words have consequences. ...

Nicola Richards: I totally agree ... Just in the past few days, I have been alarmed by the ... number of people who do not understand why hate speech, tweets and what they call freedom of speech are being reported to the police. ...

Since 7 October, the call for an "intifada until victory" has been plastered up and down campuses, and a model motion calling for that was passed at University College London and the University of East Anglia students' union. ... Perhaps we could have some clarity on the legality of the term in those contexts. ...

col 37WH Policing must be robust, with zero tolerance. Sentencing must not be lenient. Education must be improved and widespread. Relevant authorities, whether they be universities, councils or companies, need to work to support Jewish colleagues, employees or students, and ensure that they recognise their duty of care....

Last week, I met people my age who had survived a massacre at a music festival purely because of their immense courage and chance. I met heartbroken but determined families of hostages and people killed. I witnessed a nation still overcome with grief. For those who diminish what happened on 7 October—or worse, seek to justify it—I hope they will never witness what those strong and brave people did. I watched 47 minutes of the gleeful spree and slaughter by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, as well as civilians. Nothing will erase those images from my mind: the look of fear in their eyes that I did not know was possible. Nothing will ever be the same again for Jewish people around the world following that dreadful day in October last year ...

Antisemitism is centuries old, but it still persists. ... We must remain unwavering and uncompromising in our efforts to challenge it ...

Sharon Hodgson (Labour): ... the wave of antisemitism we have seen across the country since 7 October is shocking and appalling. We have heard "Burn the Jews!" shouted at protest marches. Jewish children have been advised not to wear their school blazers.

Swastikas have been graffitied in public places, and Jewish schools vandalised with red paint. Jews have been harassed, intimidated and assaulted in the street and as they leave their places of worship.

col 38WH The roll call of incidents is both long and shameful. It is shameful that in Britain, in 2024, our fellow citizens are subject to such racism and hatred. Sadly, however, it is not surprising.

As the Community Security Trust suggests, whenever Israel is at war there is an increase in antisemitism incidents, and an acute rise is usually reported specifically in and related to educational establishments ...

Let us be clear: these antisemitic attacks are nothing less than the latest iteration of the oldest hatred. In the charges levelled against Zionists—that they control the media and the Government, that they are disloyal, greedy and bloodthirsty, and that they are ideologically akin to, and collaborated with, the Nazis—we see the repetition of classic antisemitic tropes and smears. Our country, which rightly prides itself on its tolerance and its rejection of extremism, cannot allow antisemitism to go unchecked and unchallenged. ...

First ... we need an increase in policing and stronger action to tackle and monitor antisemitism, and we must ensure that the police have the powers they need to tackle to hateful extremism. Secondly, it is appalling that Jewish venues and institutions need extra levels of security and protection, but as long as that remains the case, it is imperative that the Community Security Trust receives the funding it needs to do its vital job. Thirdly, what is said online rarely stays online. The hateful conspiracy theories and lies about Jews and Israel that are peddled on social media by antisemites directly contribute to racism on our streets. Social media companies must enforce their own rules against hate speech, and where crimes are committed, they must co-operate with the police to ensure that the guilty are punished.

Fourthly, in relation to universities, the National Union of Students and student unions must do more to fight antisemitism and to ensure the safety of Jewish students. ...

Finally, Iran is a leading purveyor of holocaust denial, antisemitism and extremism. Its terrorist proxy armies slaughter Jews, while its ideological arm, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, attempts to incite and perpetuate violence and spread disinformation globally, including throughout Britain. As Labour has argued, we must proscribe the IRGC and begin to turn off this pipeline of hatred.

col 39WH In two weeks' time, we will mark Holocaust Memorial Day. This year's theme is the fragility of freedom, and that is especially relevant in the light of the antisemitism that we have seen on our streets over the past three months. Without security, there can be no freedom. Freedom from fear and violence is the prerequisite of any civilised country. We cannot allow Britain's Jewish community to be denied that freedom.

Nickie Aiken (Conservative): ... According to the Metropolitan police, in my constituency of the Cities of London and Westminster, we have sadly seen an unprecedented 1,350% increase in the number of antisemitic incidents since the awful scenes on 7 October in Israel. I received an email from a Jewish constituent who is in her late 70s, I believe, and was born and bred in the United Kingdom. She says: "Some of my non-Jewish friends ask me if I feel safe now. The answer is generally yes, but I would not want to wear my necklace with its star of David when it can be seen. I would not feel safe walking past the pro-Palestinian protests if they knew I was Jewish. I love this country. I cannot think of living anywhere else. I have never been to Israel, but Palestine supporters, when I spoke to them in the street a couple of years ago, said I had no business being here, and a neighbour told me I should not be living in Belgravia; I should go to Golders Green or Stamford Hill." ...

We cannot live in a country where we shrug our shoulders when somebody is antisemitic. We would not do it if someone was being racist towards a black person or somebody of Muslim heritage; equally, we must not allow it to happen to the Jewish community. ...

The incidents are wide-ranging, and include the use of intimidating language, physical

abuse and criminal damage to property. They have all been reported. One of the biggest issues raised with me as the local MP is abuse on university campuses—places where students should feel free to express themselves and their identity without threat of intimidation.

col 40WH Christine Jardine: ... I was frightened by a recent conversation with a University of Glasgow student who went to a meeting about the war in Gaza. He thought it would be a wide-ranging discussion, but he suddenly found himself at the centre of a meeting that was very antisemitic. He did not feel comfortable; he felt under threat. ...

Nickie Aiken: ... One of the most important books I have read over the past couple of years is David Baddiel's "Jews Don't Count". I have always been a supporter of the Jewish community ... but I had never really thought about the cultural antisemitism in this country. None of us really thinks it is racism—well, many of us do, but it is seen as, "Oh, they are Jewish; it's fine." As I said earlier, if the target was a black person or anybody of colour, it would be considered completely differently. ...

According to the Union of Jewish Students, there has been a staggering 500% increase in antisemitism on university campuses. ... One young man of Jewish heritage, British born and bred—from north London—experienced his first antisemitism on the tube coming to visit me. That was shocking for both of us. Those students, who are part of the UJS, have been doing absolutely fantastic work to support Jewish students over the past few months and before that. They informed me that they have received more than 400 calls to their hotline reporting antisemitic abuse over the past few months. ...

Initiatives such as the LSE's "Report It, Stop It" allow students to safely and anonymously report abusive or threatening behaviour. However, that sort of mechanism is effective only if the reported abuse is met with swift repercussions for the offenders ...

col 41WH It is not only Jewish students who feel intimidated. Unfortunately, Jewish primary school children are being targeted as well. Some feel so uncomfortable that they cannot show their true identity when on school trips. This struck me so clearly in November last year, when a group of Jewish primary school children visited me. ... They were boys, about 10 years old. The first thing I noticed when I met them was that they were all wearing baseball caps. I asked their teacher why, and it was to hide their kippahs. British children in the House of Commons were hiding their identity for their own safety. How have we come to that? ...

col 42WH Jim Shannon (DUP): ... When we look at this important issue, especially this month, in which we celebrate Holocaust Memorial Day and recognise the devastation that the Jewish community has been subject to in the past, it saddens me—it saddens us all—to see that across the United Kingdom, including in Northern Ireland, we have seen a torrent of antisemitic attacks, more recently throughout the war on Israel. ...

I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief. We speak up for those of the Christian faith, those of other faiths, and those with no faith, because we believe in our hearts that everyone who has a religious belief has a right to express it. The Jewish people have a right to express theirs, without any fear of threat or hindrance whatsoever.

Gregory Campbell: ... does my hon. Friend agree that the protests, which get out of hand more than occasionally, are based on a false premise, and on misinformation peddled on social media? For example, in Israel there are hundreds of mosques, and freedom of religion for Muslim people to go to them. That is in sharp contrast with the very low number of synagogues in some of the adjoining Arab nation states. ...

Jim Shannon: ... I attended an event in the synagogue in Belfast some time ago. ... I sat beside a young student, and I said, "Tell me this: how are things in Queen's University in Belfast?" ... She told me that she felt threatened by some elements ... there were threats ... from students of a different political opinion. She clearly felt threatened.

At times of conflict between countries, there are always religious and cultural tensions, with

some communities feeling threatened and frightened to live in their own country. At the outbreak of the Israel-Palestine conflict, I received calls and emails in my office about an incident that occurred at the city hall in Belfast. There were pictures and videos going around on social media of Lasair Dhearg activists—those of a nationalist opinion—projecting on to city hall an image of Hamas fighters paragliding into Israel, alongside the words “smash the Zionists”. I want my police service, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, to make those people accountable for their actions. ...

col 43WH Further to that, in North Down, a neighbouring constituency, a local Bangor Central councillor had incidents of antisemitic hate language scribbled on a local park bench reported to him. ...

Antisemitic crime in the UK has risen sharply amid the renewed conflict in Gaza, with 1,000 incidents logged by the Jewish charity Community Security Trust. What is taking place is just astounding. ...

There is no place in society for racially motivated groups who use threat and terror to achieve their aim. A just and harsh punishment must be implemented to ensure that these crimes do not go by with a mere slap on the wrist. ...

col 44WH **Andrew Percy (Conservative):** ... We know that a survey conducted by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research found that 30% of the public hold at least one antisemitic view, so it is fair to assume that up to a similar percentage of people who attend some of these marches, which have been deeply distressing for Jewish people, also hold some of those views. It may be true that the majority of people who have attended the marches have been peaceful, but if they find themselves marching alongside people who call for jihad, display symbols in support of terrorism and call for an intifada, perhaps they should consider whether they should be keeping that company. ...

When, in 2017, I had the privilege of responding to the Holocaust Memorial Day debate as the Minister, I said: “Unfortunately, there has been an increased Israelification of anti-Semitism, using Israel and Zionism as a proxy for Jews. I have seen that and been on the receiving end of it, particularly on Twitter. There are pictures of the Star of David represented as the Nazi flag—that is unacceptable and a form of anti-Semitism.”—[\[Official Report, 19 January 2017; Vol. 619, c. 1168.\]](#)

That is exactly what we have seen displayed on the streets of this country in recent weeks. I have become increasingly concerned about the tone and what I believe is the one-sided nature of the coverage of this conflict in parts of the media, and about what that is doing to fuel Jew hate in this country. As has been said, it is bad enough that we already have people on the streets of Britain calling for an intifada. Let us remember what the last intifada involved: the bombing of a pub, the blowing up of buses and the murder of a nine-year-old Israeli child whose head was smashed between a rifle butt and a rock. That is what an intifada means, yet people are on the streets of this country marching for that and are not arrested for it. ...

My fear is that this Israelification of antisemitism—this Israelophobia—is now engrained at every level of British society. ... we find it today in academia among university lecturers; it seems that it is tolerated in schools; it is promoted by ignorant football pundits, senior professionals and actors; and I am sorry to say that it is given succour in parts of the British media. Behind it sit age-old but updated antisemitic tropes, which include that Jews are too powerful and that they are untrustworthy, sneaky and greedy. ... It is a poison that has dripped into every aspect of western life and has been promoted by very clever activists who, over decades, have created a false history and a false narrative about Jews in the middle east, have smeared Zionism and, in so doing, have played on the victimhood of Palestinians which, itself, has taken away agency from Palestinians.

What is this Israelophobia—this updated antisemitism? As the editor of *The Jewish Chronicle* put it, it has three elements: demonisation, “smeared Israel as evil and a threat to the world”; weaponisation, “exploiting social justice movements as a Trojan horse for hatred of Jews and their national home”—how we have seen that on the streets of Britain;

and falsification, “echoing the lies and canards of the Nazi or Soviet propaganda.”

col 45WH That is what we have seen on the streets: people marching with banners and saying things about the state of Israel and this conflict that are directly drawn from Nazi and Soviet antisemitic propaganda. Never mind that Hamas want to murder all Jews. Never mind that the majority of Palestinians in recent polling reject co-existence with Israel. It is Israel, or rather Jews, who are the problem. ...

A Jewish banker of the past antisemitic tropes is now the Israeli lobby. Never mind the truth of how much other countries spend on lobbying, which is far more than anything spent by the state of Israel, the medieval bloodthirsty Jew, who drank the blood of Christian children, is now the bloodthirsty Israeli. ...

I have serious concerns about some of the [media] coverage we have seen—about how Israel has been singled out for special treatment, which is directly putting Jews in this country at risk. It plays into those tropes of bloodlust. Hamas’ figures on civilian casualties are reported without qualification or reference to the BBC being unable to verify their figures. The imagery of this conflict, as it would have us believe, is a well-armed Israel Defence Forces soldier versus a civilian of Gaza, never mind that the IDF is obviously seeking to destroy a despotic, terrorist death cult. For example, we are told by Jeremy Bowen that “Israelis have hardened their hearts”.

That was in a report without any evidence, any reference to polling to back it up, or any reference to the Israelis who, even in this conflict, work hard for peace between Palestinians and Israelis to this day.

Where the reporting suggests that Israel’s claims are untrustworthy, they are treated differently to those of Hamas. We are repeatedly being told of the BBC being unable to verify claims. When the BBC reported on witness statements of Israeli Jewish women being raped and murdered, not only did it challenge those statements directly to the people making them, it included within its reports that it had been unable to verify those claims. I do not remember that appearing when we had reports about the awful rapes of Yezidi women by ISIS. It certainly was not included in BBC reporting of alleged incidents involving released Palestinian prisoners, some of whom not only owe a debt to Hamas but are convicted or accused of very serious offences. They were released and allowed to tell their story, with the BBC choosing not to mention in its reporting that it had been unable to verify the numbers.

col 46WH Then, of course, we had the reporting of the “strike” on the Al-Ahli Hospital. Hamas propaganda immediately reported that there were 500 deaths and that it was an Israeli strike. We know that is untrue. It was a smear, it was a lie, and it remained on many media outlets and still remains on some of issues now. But when the IDF uncover a hospital that has weapons inside or is being used to hold hostages, what are we told? Once again, that the BBC has been unable to verify those claims ...

On 23 December, Sky analyst Sean Bell said that Hamas’s strategy may prove to be “prudent”. The rape, murder and torture of Israeli women, the cutting off of children’s limbs and the slicing off of women’s breasts may prove to be a prudent strategy—Sky News. ... These are the things that are going on in our media. Is it any wonder that Jew hate is being fuelled in this country? ...

col 47WH **Charolotte Nichols (Labour):** ... The devastating attack on 7 October had a far-reaching impact on the Jewish community in the UK, not least because its scale means that most of us are only one degree of separation from someone killed, taken hostage or otherwise impacted, as well as the huge surge in antisemitism that has so shamefully followed the attack. ...

Twitter, or X, in particular, has mainstreamed antisemitism. The number of times I have reported objectively antisemitic tweets, with posters and names that specifically reference nazi ideology, only to get an email back saying the tweets have not broken any of the website’s rules since Elon Musk’s takeover is, frankly, staggering. ...

However, the online sphere does not stay online. Recently, I was accosted by a man on

the street. While he was filming me—he later posted the video online—he made repeated references to me being part of a Jewish and Masonic conspiracy to commit genocide against Catholics and Muslims and shouted at me that I was a murderer. ...

Ultimately, hatred is only defeated by solidarity. We have some incredible local initiatives to build relationships between communities, which are more important now than ever, but constraints on local government finance mean that some of the more targeted support that can make the most difference is under-resourced. ...

col 48WH Alex Sobel (Labour Co-op): ... I recently spoke to Jewish students at Leeds University, where there have been a number of antisemitic incidents. One of those was when Moazzam Begg, who has diminished the role of Hamas in the 7 October massacre, was invited to speak. Jewish and other students raised concerns, but the student union did not cancel the room booking, citing the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which my hon. Friend and I both warned would create scenarios that could unleash antisemitism on campus. It appears that we have been proved right, as the horrific events in October and the misguided aim of allowing freedom of speech on campuses have unleashed a wave of antisemitism. Is it not time that we looked at the legislation again, to protect Jewish students on campus?

Charlotte Nichols: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct that there have been some unintended consequences from that legislation ...

Kirsten Oswald (SNP): ... My constituency of East Renfrewshire is, on the face of it—and indeed under the surface—a very nice but perhaps unremarkable place. But scratch the surface even slightly and we are very much more than that. East Renfrewshire is one of the most diverse communities in Scotland. We have a fantastically active and growing Muslim community locally ... We have a thriving and broad spectrum of Christian congregations ... and ... significant Hindu and Sikh communities, which are all contributing brilliant things to our area. Our Baha'i community does so much to improve our local environment, and we are home to a significant Jewish community also. ... We are the better for the contribution that the Jewish communities and these other faith and non-faith groups make locally. ...

col 49WH We have all watched in horror as events have unfolded in the middle east. ... Some who have expressed concern to me locally have actually been members of other faith communities, troubled by the worries their neighbours face. I visited an excellent local Muslim centre recently to discuss the worrying rise in Islamophobia, and was struck by the sincere concerns raised by the people I was speaking to about the impact on the Jewish community locally and the increase in antisemitism. ...

We have heard today that antisemitism always rises at home when there is conflict in the middle east. We have seen overt threats. We have seen the horrible denial, the stereotypes and the tropes online, but not only online. ...

No one's identity should ever be a reason for hatred. That is never acceptable. There is no place for antisemitism or hatred in our communities. Nothing can justify expressions of racial or religious hatred—nothing at all—and history has surely shown us the peril of not standing up and rejecting intolerance and prejudice. ...

Andrew Percy: ... I mentioned the Institute for Jewish Policy Research's previous study, which showed that up to 30% of British people hold at least one antisemitic trope. Does she agree that now is perhaps a good time to update that, and for the Minister to look into whether we can fund another piece of research in the area?

col 50WH Kirsten Oswald: ... The more we can do to shine a light on the realities of people's lives, the realities of communities and the issues people face, the better. ...

It was right that the Scottish Government formally adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-semitism, as did my own party, and the continued dialogue and solidarity is particularly important at the moment.

I was privileged to speak alongside our First Minister, Humza Yousaf, at a moving and

profound service at the Giffnock Newton Mearns synagogue in October, and the mutual sorrow, concern and respect between the Muslim First Minister of Scotland and the Jewish hosts of the ceremony was clear. We have to stand collectively. I am grateful for the meetings between the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities and the First Minister, and for the exemplary ongoing work of those organisations. ...

When I spoke to my constituents about Remembrance Sunday events, I was very sorry to hear some of them express a reluctance to wear medals or carry wreaths that showed their Jewish identity. Nobody should fear laying a star of David wreath or wearing a star of David medal. The irony that they were fearful at that event should not be lost on us. ...

It is not just the horrible spectre of antisemitism ... but the cumulative worry, the build-up of concerns and the impact on people's general confidence about going about their business that matter. We need to seriously take account of the anxiety that people experience about the prospect of antisemitism. ...

col 51WH Scotland is a safe place, but it is important that we are clear that we are not immune from this old hatred. ...

Liz Twist (Labour): ... The horrific attacks carried out by Hamas on 7 October have caused and continue to cause widespread grief within the Jewish community here in Britain. On top of that, the substantial increase in antisemitic incidents and offences in the months since has created an environment in which many members of our Jewish community feel threatened, vulnerable and unsafe, as we have heard.

We thank the Community Security Trust for its tireless efforts alongside the police to protect and support the Jewish community across Britain. Between 7 October and 13 December, the CST recorded more than 2,000 incidents of antisemitism, including 95 assaults and 165 direct threats. That is the highest total number of incidents it has recorded in that kind of time period since its records began 40 years ago. Police forces around the country have similarly recorded spikes in antisemitic offences in the months since 7 October. We know that many hate crimes go unreported, so those figures by no means reflect the full picture, and nor can they fully capture the deep and tangible impact that these incidents are having on the Jewish community as a whole. ...

col 52WH Sadly, the appalling spike in antisemitism over the past few months has been paralleled by rising antisemitism across the world. ... It is essential that we stand together in condemning such horrifying attacks.

Urgent action must be taken to prevent antisemitic hate crime, as well as all categories and strands of hate crime, which have soared over the last decade in Britain. We must take steps to ensure that incidents are reported, investigated and prosecuted, and be clear that we mean business in tackling antisemitism. ...

At a time when antisemitism and Islamophobia divide our communities, cross-community and interfaith activities can bolster community cohesion. What action have the Government taken to promote positive, long-term projects to support community cohesion, and have they sought to identify and share examples of best practice at local authority level? ...

col 53WH It is essential that swift and firm action is taken to prevent antisemitic crime. In government, Labour will take firm action to do so. ...

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety (Lee Rowley): ... This debate ... is most definitely a necessity. It is a necessity, because in this seat of democracy there is an opportunity to call out the appalling acts of a tiny minority in recent months. It is a necessity for us to shine light on unacceptable behaviour, and to speak and articulate what we have sadly seen in recent months from a tiny group of people—that is, pure antisemitism. It might be dressed up as something else: it might be shrouded in a plaintive sense of emotion; it might be a preamble of obfuscation or confusion; it might be an inaccurate reference to fighting for something else; it might be the imposition of a horrifying hierarchy where Jewish deaths, Jewish injuries and Jewish blood appear to be less

important than any other; or it might be the extraordinary insertion of context into the deaths of 1,200 people on 7 October. In truth, some are not even that subtle, and are now explicit about it, but whatever it is—whether implicit or explicit—we see it: it is present. If it walks, talks and acts like what it might be, then it probably is. It is antisemitism.

I want to be clear that no one in this room, nor the Government, seek to close down debate. No one here seeks to conflate legitimate criticism of one actor, one country, or one situation with explicit discrimination and prejudice. No one does not acknowledge the horror of war and the inhumanity of conflict—any conflict, anywhere, anytime, in any part of the world. No one is saying that we should not hear hard things; that is the mark of a civilised, educated, compassionate and curious society. But the other mark of a civilised society is calling out when things have gone too far, both implicitly and explicitly.

col 54WH Part of the answer is law—you cannot incite violence—but another part is personal responsibility. ... with the “From the river to the sea” chant, there is the most incredible abdication of responsibility for those who have used it casually, willingly, publicly—even, for some, joyfully. It may not be the case that everyone who has said it is antisemitic, but it absolutely is the case that all antisemites would be happy to use it.

There may also be a staggering misapplication of emotion via the trusted, weird logic of post-modernism that has taken root in so many of our universities, which abolishes the agency of the individual, dismantles the principle of the nation state and sees society only through the prism of a power dynamic where everyone either holds no power whatsoever, or holds all the power; and it follows that, as a result, anything that those without power do is virtuous and everyone who may have some semblance of power must be disregarded, ignored and dehumanised. ...

This is not Britain. It is not supposed to be like this. This debate should not have happened; we are supposed to have moved on from this. It is clear that we have not. ...

Like so many others in this debate, I have seen examples as a constituency MP. Individual one: an employee at a Russell Group university who raises money for charity in her spare time. She started to email me on Saturday 28 October to ask whether it is donations to my party or the selling of weapons to Israel that influences my stand. She tells me that she does not agree with me about “from the river to the sea” being a call for a race to be wiped out. She tells me that groups such as Hamas will continue while Israel does what it does. Next, individual two: a nurse practitioner just over the border in Sheffield, who lives in my constituency. She asks me how I sleep at night, tells me there is collective punishment, that there is a war crime and that there is genocide. Then individual three: an ex-civil servant, an economist and a volunteer at a children’s society, who decided to debate with me on Facebook how much terrorism would be acceptable. Or individual four: a retired nurse who posts sunsets on Facebook and talks about a plan to free up land, with some rubbing their hands together for oil deals and expansion. It is just incredible.

col 55WH If someone had told me on Friday 6 October that within three months we would have seen Jewish schools vandalised, missing persons posters torn down, a massive rise in crime, Jewish friends telling me they sometimes no longer feel safe in this country and words that have real meaning being casually tossed around, I would not have believed them. If they had told me on Friday 6 October that the apparent genesis of that hatred was the execution of 1,200 innocent Jewish people simply for the crime of being Jewish, that would have been doubly shocking. ...

... we continue with efforts to reduce radicalisation through the network of Prevent practitioners, who provide training to school staff on radicalisation and empower teachers to challenge extremism in the classroom. The reporting extremism online form allows concerns to be raised directly with the Department for Education. Since 7 October, the Government have engaged with schools, colleges and universities to offer support and guidance. The Education Secretary wrote to the sector urging them to respond swiftly to hate-related incidents and to actively reassure Jewish students so they can study without fear, harassment or intimidation ...

At the opening of the autumn statement, the Chancellor made clear his deep concerns about the rise of antisemitism, underscoring the Government's commitment to tackling it. His commitments were backed by a further £7 million in funding over the next three years to help tackle antisemitism in education. I will take away the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) about research. I would be happy to do that, and, if we can, I am sure we will try. ...

col 56WH Ministers from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology recently convened social media companies and community voices to discuss online antisemitism and to understand the impact of this abhorrent content on communities. As part of the implementation of the Online Safety Act, we will remain in contact with social media platforms, and we have been clear that they need not wait for regulation before taking action.

I want to end with something that a Jewish friend once told me many years ago, long before the recent challenges. We were in conversation about our backgrounds, childhoods and families. In truth, I thought I would educate her, as the working class kid from Derbyshire talking to the posh girl from London. I told her about my background, and I waited for her to contrast it with her Twickenham upbringing, her gilded life at private school and her middle-class comforts, which she did. At the end, she turned to her Jewish heritage. It is something that she has always been hugely proud of, and she spoke about it with verve, passion and a reverence for history.

Casually, right at the end, my friend said one of the most arresting things that I have ever heard. "Of course, Lee," she said, looking at me right in the eye, "I always keep a bag packed under my bed." Confused, I did not immediately catch on. I had no knowledge, no background, no experience—I do not think I had met a Jewish person until I was 18. I am not saying that this is indicative of everybody in the community, but she said, "For me and my family, it is something we have done for decades. History taught us that we needed to be ready in case something ever went wrong, as it did for my forefathers and their forefathers before them. I don't think it will ever be necessary, but it's there in case it is—in case this country ever stops being my home."

That must never ever happen. We are proud of our Jewish communities, just as we are proud of every single other community that makes up this rich patchwork of the United Kingdom, and we stand with them today. ...

col 57WH **Nicola Richards:** ... The Minister also mentioned that he was asked how he sleeps at night given his support for Israel. ... I have not slept very well. I watched 47 minutes of innocent Jews—children, women, men—being slaughtered; I saw evidence of rape. I have not slept very well. No person at the moment in Israel, or any Jewish person around the world, is sleeping well.

It is impossible to get one's head around the evil displayed that day, so it is hard to explain how disgusting it is for people to blame 7 October on Jews or on Israel, or try to use what happened as a springboard for their own antisemitic beliefs. A rise in antisemitism in the UK in 2024, in response to the 7 October attack in particular, serves as a national embarrassment. I am pleased to hear the commitment from colleagues today to do all we can to reverse that. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-09/debates/66C0DDE8-B3FD-43F9-AB0F-D841263150F4/AntisemiticOffences>

The Scottish First Minister's speech at Giffnock Newton Mearns Synagogue, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/first-minister-speech-service-solidarity-giffnock-synagogue/>

House of Commons Written Answer

BBC: Political Impartiality

Dehenna Davison (Conservative) [7670] To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the BBC's compliance with the impartiality clauses in its charter.

Julia Lopez: The BBC has a duty to deliver impartial and accurate news coverage and content under its Royal Charter. As such, the Government has been clear that the BBC must place a firm emphasis on impartiality and maintaining the highest editorial standards.

The Government welcomes that the BBC accepted the findings and recommendations of the Serota Review and has committed to reform through its 10 point Impartiality and Editorial Standards Action Plan. The BBC now needs to demonstrate clear and continued progress as the plan is embedded into business as usual.

The Government established Ofcom as the independent regulator of the BBC in 2017. Ofcom is responsible for holding the BBC to account against its impartiality responsibilities. It remains a priority for the Government to work with Ofcom to deliver an effective and proportionate regulatory framework that holds the BBC to account while maintaining its creative freedom and operational independence.

A key focus of the Government's Mid-Term Review of the BBC is to look at the regulatory and governance measures which can enable progress on impartiality, more accountability for editorial standards, including the handling of complaints, and a BBC that represents the breadth of the audience it was established to serve. Our work on the Mid-Term Review is ongoing. The Charter specifies that the review must take place between 2022 and 2024, and we will publish our findings and conclusions in due course.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7670>

The Serota Review, referred to above, can be read at

<https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/reports/the-serota-review.pdf>

The Action Plan referred to above can be read at

<https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/reports/impartiality-and-editorial-standards-action-plan.pdf>

UK Parliament Petition and Observations

Definition of Islamophobia

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom, Declares that a formal, government-backed definition of Islamophobia is needed; further declares that the definition by the APPG on British Muslims is more appropriate, which defines Islamophobia as "rooted in racism and a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness;" notes that this definition recognises that Muslims are subject to a system of discrimination, control and socio-economic exclusion, alongside hate crime, harassment and abuse; further notes that adopting this definition is an important first step towards tackling hatred against Muslims in Britain.

The petitioners therefore urge the House of Commons to formally adopt the APPG's definition of Islamophobia and take further steps to tackle Islamophobia in the UK.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[\[Presented by Afzal Khan, Official Report, 22 November 2023; Vol. 741, c. 426.\]](#) [P002871]

Observations from The Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety (Lee Rowley): Anti-Muslim hatred, just like any other form of religious-based discrimination, is

completely abhorrent and has no place in our society. No one should ever be a victim of hatred because of their race or religion and the Government continue to work with police and community partners to monitor and combat it.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales, which provides estimates of the volume of hate crime incidents, shows a long-term decline in hate crime, with a 38% fall in incidents reported between surveys in 2007-2009 and 2017-2020. This is in keeping with a similar percentage fall of 39% in crime overall over the same period.

Tell MAMA have recorded 1,202 incidents of anti-Muslim hatred since 7 October (7 October - 30 November). This figure demonstrates a sevenfold increase in cases from the 2022 figure of 172. We are concerned with this sharp rise in anti-Muslim hatred, which comes alongside a very steep increase in antisemitic incidents as well as wider community tensions. Anti-Muslim hatred remains at an elevated level compared to the same time last year (October - November 2022) and the weekly average for 2023.

We are proud to have funded Tell MAMA, a service that supports victims of anti-Muslim hatred, with over £6 million since their inception in 2012. Tell MAMA's work has been recognised internationally as a good practice model in recording and monitoring anti-Muslim hate. In light of the rise in anti-Muslim hate incidents being reported, the Government has increased Tell MAMA's funding to £1 million this year. This funding will provide additional resource to the service they are providing to support victims of anti-Muslim hatred. The Government will also make available an additional £4.9 million to Muslim community groups for the protection of mosques and Muslim Faith schools-this uplift will also be maintained into 2024-2025. This takes total funding for Muslim communities to £29.4 million, available in each year 2023-2024 and 2024-2025.

This funding can be used to provide protective security at mosques and Muslim faith schools, which can include physical protective security measures, such as CCTV, intruder alarms and secure perimeter fencing.

Alongside the increase in funding for mosques and Muslim faith schools, the Communities Secretary hosted a roundtable with Tell MAMA and counter-extremism experts in late November 2023, to hear their experiences and feedback. With regards to the petition on the definition of Islamophobia, it is an issue to which the Department has given careful consideration.

The definition of Islamophobia as proposed by the APPG is not in line with the Equality Act 2010, which defines race in terms of colour, nationality and national or ethnic origins. The proposed definition could also unintentionally undermine freedom of speech, and prevent legitimate criticism of Islamist ideology, or of unacceptable cultural and/or religious practices.

The term anti-Muslim hatred is a more precise term which better reflects UK hate crime legislation. It also allows better space for critical debate about theology, culture and religious practice, while acknowledging this should typically be done in a way which affords people respect. We want to make sure that the terminology we use does not engender divisions and tensions between British Muslims, and that our language responds to the various forms of hatred experienced by Muslims. This includes people who are Sunni, Shi'a, Ahmadi or part of any other Muslim group, as well as those of Muslim heritage who may express their faith in diverse plural ways or not at all. This approach also encompasses the experiences of those perceived to be Muslim and targeted as a result of this.

This is a topic we continue to explore more broadly as we look at tackling all forms of religious hatred. The department is currently seeking the views and perspectives of domestic and international experts in this field to explore how religious hatred is experienced by British communities, and how it affects different faiths and individuals.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-09/debates/24010969000020/DefinitionOfIslamophobia>

Information about the APPG definition, referred to above, can be read at

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>

The Crime Survey for England and Wales, referred to above, can be read at <https://www.crimesurvey.co.uk/en/index.html>

Trades Union Congress (TUC)

What's the faith and belief network?

Trade unions ... campaign to change policy and improve life for working people across the country. We represent our members; fight for dignity and respect at work; and we fight against in-work poverty and deprivation. And we play a vital role defending working class communities and strengthening social bonds.

The Faith and Belief network was set up in recognition that we are not the only ones that do this work.

There are a whole raft of groups, organisations and societies that ... are also concerned with these issues. Many of these are based in local churches, mosques, synagogues etc. And others identify religious principles as being vital to their outlook and mission.

Moreover, a lot of trade unionists identify as members of these groups, and view their participation in social and political life through that lens. ...

The network is not intended as a forum for addressing faith-based discrimination, antisemitism or anti-Muslim racism.

These are serious issues and trade unions and their members are committed to fighting them. But, they come under the remit of other bodies. ...

The network also doesn't address specifically religious topics. While we recognise that spiritual and religious issues will be important to many trade unionists, they are best equipped to discuss and debate those within and between their faith-based communities.

The network is not intended to engage in religious discussions and debates. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/whats-faith-and-belief-network>

TOP

Holocaust

Scottish Parliament Motion

Paul O'Kane (Labour) [S6M-11789] Holocaust Memorial Day 2024 – That the Parliament recognises Holocaust Memorial Day 2024; remembers the six million Jewish people murdered during the Holocaust, alongside the millions of others killed under the Nazi's persecution of other minority groups; reflects on the millions of people who have been murdered in more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur; recognises that Holocaust Memorial Day takes place on 27 January, marking the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp; acknowledges that the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day is developed annually by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust; reflects on this year's theme, Fragility of Freedom; understands that, in every genocide that has taken place, those who are targeted have had their freedom restricted and removed, before many of them are murdered and that, despite this, in every genocide, there are those who risk their own freedom to help others, to preserve others' freedom or to stand up to the regime; congratulates the efforts of the Holocaust Memorial Day activity organisers around Scotland who bring people together to

learn lessons from history, and understands the importance of challenging all forms of prejudice to ensure that lessons of such events are fully learnt.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-11789>

TOP

Israel

See also the Westminster Hall Debate “Antisemitic Offences” that is included in the Home Affairs section above, and

Ministerial statement HCWS167 “Red Sea”, and Commons oral answers “Protection of Shipping Routes” that are included in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Israel and Palestine

col 23 David Lammy (Labour): To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office if he will make a statement on the situation in Israel and Palestine.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): Let me begin by reiterating our fundamental belief in Israel’s right to defend itself against Hamas. The events of 7 October were truly horrifying. Israel has a right to restore its security and to ensure that such horrifying events can never be repeated. We are also clear that too many civilians have been killed. Israel needs to ensure that its campaign is targeted on Hamas leaders and operatives, fulfils its obligations to protect civilians and is consistent with international humanitarian law.

No one wants to see this conflict go on for a moment longer than necessary. That is why the United Kingdom played a leading role in securing the passage of UN Security Council resolution 2720, which made clear the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access. The resolution also called for the release of hostages and for steps towards a sustainable ceasefire, for which the British Government have consistently led calls.

Britain has been pushing a number of innovative and impactful approaches—especially, but not only, maritime delivery—to support aid for Gaza. ... UK Ministers are lobbying the Government of Israel hard and regularly to allow more aid in and reduce the numerous constraints that are hindering many aspects of our and others’ efforts to help Gazan civilians. ...

... the risk of famine is stark, and the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers throughout the Government are pushing the need to address this with the Israeli Government.

The Government are urging all sides to avoid further escalation. The situation is fragile and an escalation in violence, including on Lebanon’s southern border with Israel, is not in anyone’s interests. In the Red sea, the Houthis’ attacks against commercial shipping are patently unacceptable. ...

There is no perfect formula for peace. What I can say is that Gaza should ultimately be under Palestinian control, and we support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both Israeli and Palestinian people.

col 24 David Lammy: ... There has been no let-up to the intolerable suffering in Gaza and no end to the cruelty for hostages. Millions are displaced, desperate and hungry. Israel continues to use devastating tactics that have seen far too many innocent civilians killed, with unacceptable blocks on essential aid, nowhere safe for civilians, a growing

humanitarian catastrophe, and now warnings of a deadly famine. Meanwhile, Hamas terrorists continue to hold hostages, hide among civilians and fire rockets into Israel. ... The need for a sustained ceasefire is clear. The fighting must stop urgently. We need a humanitarian truce now—not as a short pause but as the first step towards what will stop the killing of innocents, provide urgent humanitarian relief, ward off famine, free hostages and provide the space for a sustainable ceasefire so that fighting does not restart. ... Will the Minister tell the House what steps the Government are taking to urge restraint in Lebanon and to see the full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1701, which would allow civilians on both sides of the border to return home? In the Red sea, all the targeting of commercial ships and international trade routes that puts civilians and military personnel in danger must stop, so I welcome the approach of the US, the UK, Germany and others to send clear warnings to those responsible. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... The right hon. Gentleman calls for a sustained ceasefire, and the British Government believe that is the right approach. ...

The right hon. Gentleman is also entirely right to say it is important that the conflict is contained, and from the first moment Britain has moved military assets and other equipment to try to ensure that we detect any likelihood of it spreading more widely. ...

col 25 Alicia Kearns (Conservative): ... I welcome the £2 million for additional food and the special envoy that so many of us have been calling for. First, now that Israel says it has dismantled Hamas in the north of Gaza, what are the plans to surge aid into the area, and what are Israel's plans to rebuild the territory? Secondly, will my right hon. Friend give consideration to my proposal for an Israel-Palestine contact group that can start the hard work of a long-term peace process by kicking off track 2 negotiations?

Andrew Mitchell: I thank the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee for her comments about a contact group, which we will look at extremely carefully. ... The problems at the moment are not a shortfall in funding; they are in getting the food and necessary humanitarian requirements inside Gaza. ...

Brendan O'Hara (SNP): ... it has not been a happy new year for the 2 million desperate and terrified people trapped inside Gaza, for whom 2024 brought further constant bombardment as well as the threat of famine and disease, with 50,000 people injured and almost 25,000 confirmed killed. That proves that repeated pleas from this Government and others for Israel to abide by international humanitarian law have been routinely ignored. Scotland's First Minister recently described what is happening in Gaza as "tantamount to ethnic cleansing", and South Africa has asked the International Court of Justice to urgently declare Israel in breach of the 1948 genocide convention for its continued killing of Palestinians, the destruction of homes, the expulsion of people and the blockade of food, water and medical assistance. Do the UK Government think that Scotland's First Minister and the Government of South Africa are wrong in their assessment of the current situation? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... The Government respect the role of the ICJ and we will of course follow what is going on with great care. We have always made it clear that it is up to the courts to determine these matters and that all parties must ensure that their actions are proportionate and necessary and minimise harm to civilians.

Andrew Percy (Conservative): What have we learned since we last met? We have learned that Hamas are using North Korean weapons. We have heard of further examples of gender-based violence, we have heard examples of hostages being kept in cages, and we have heard the testimony of a released 17-year-old hostage, Agam Goldstein Almog, who spoke of sexual violence and torture perpetrated against hostages who are still being held. To top it all, in the last few days Jibril Rajoub, a Palestinian Authority representative and the secretary of Fatah's central committee, has said: "We view political Islam, and foremost among it the Hamas Movement, as part of the fabric of our struggle and our political and social fabric."

Given what the Minister has said about the need for a two-state solution and the role of Fatah and the PA in that, what representations is he making to the PA about the radicalised language that they are using?

col 26 Andrew Mitchell: The Government urge everyone to exercise restraint in the language that they use, but I entirely accept my hon. Friend's first point. ... As for the Palestinian Authority, Britain and our allies, and like-minded countries, are doing a great deal of work to try to secure a better arrangement for it when the fighting stops.

John McDonnell (Labour): ... A number of non-governmental organisations, such as Save the Children, are now working to evacuate children from Gaza to ensure that they receive urgent medical treatment in third countries. Will the Minister ask his officials to convene a meeting of the NGOs to establish what further assistance our country could give in this respect ...

Andrew Mitchell: The right hon. Gentleman is right about the plight of children on both sides of this conflict. ... field hospitals, both inside and outside Gaza, are an important aspect of that. They could have a dramatic effect, and using them would be much better than taking people who are wounded either on to ships or to other countries. ...

Tobias Ellwood (Conservative): The conflict is clearly escalating, and no single power or, indeed, alliance is in full control, but what we should not lose control over is freedom of navigation and shipping movements in international waters. Surely a red line has already been crossed ... Will we not just take out those missiles in the air, but attack the silos from which they are launched?

Andrew Mitchell: ... HMS Diamond has shot down an attack drone, on, I think, the first occasion that the Navy has been in action in that way for 30 years. ...

col 27 Apsana Begum (Labour): Just today, Medical Aid For Palestinians has reported that, along with the International Rescue Committee's emergency medical team, it has been forced to withdraw and cease activities at Al-Aqsa hospital—the only functioning hospital in Gaza's middle area—as a result of increasing Israeli military activity around it. ... Can the Minister tell us whether the Government's support for the continued bombing of civilians and civilian infrastructure will now apply in every conflict, or whether it applies only in relation to Palestinian civilians and Palestinian hospitals?

Andrew Mitchell: ... all parties must ensure that their actions are proportionate and necessary and minimise harm to civilians, and it is in that context that we seek on all occasions to urge the Israeli Government to adopt those three key criteria. ...

Alec Shelbrooke (Conservative): ... Are the Government having any discussions in the wider Arab region to get Hamas to move away from their stated aims of destroying Israel and to ensure that they disarm, which would allow a basis on which to bring this fighting to an end?

Andrew Mitchell: ... He is right about the importance of ensuring that all pressure is put on Hamas to desist from these outrageous and horrendous proposals that make up part of its charter. ...

Paul Blomfield (Labour): Said Zaaneen, a PhD student at the University of Sheffield, has been trapped in Gaza by the war. ... The Foreign Office has been compiling lists of those who wish to leave, but it is currently limited to dual nationals and their immediate dependants. ... would the Minister consider extending eligibility for the Foreign Office lists to those Palestinian nationals who, like Said, are in the middle of courses at UK universities ...

Andrew Mitchell: I think the answer is for the hon. Gentleman and I to have a chat immediately after this urgent question, and we will see what we can do to help.

Nicola Richards (Conservative): Women and girls are reported to have been raped or mutilated by Hamas in at least seven different locations in Israel in a deliberate, systematic and premeditated way. Hostages have been reportedly subject to appalling sexual abuse,

too. These are girls as young as 18 or 19, and they are still there. What assessment has my right hon. Friend's Department made of the emerging evidence documenting Hamas-style savagery? What conversations has he had with the Red Cross, which should be stopping at nothing to insist on access to these hostages?

col 28 Andrew Mitchell: ... Our contact and heavy involvement with the Red Cross and Red Crescent is happening daily. ... it is the British Government's endeavour to ensure that there will not be impunity for those who commit these horrendous crimes. No matter how long it takes, we will do everything we can to ensure that that impunity does not exist.

Steve McCabe (Labour): The Israeli Defence Minister has set out proposals for the post-war governance of Gaza involving a multinational taskforce working with Palestinians to restore peace, order and normality. What is the British Government's assessment of those proposals?

Andrew Mitchell: We greatly welcome all constructive proposals, and we welcome the point that the Israeli Minister has made that when this dreadful conflict is over, Gaza must be run by Palestinians.

Will Quince (Conservative): Overcrowding and inadequate food, water, shelter and sanitation—the World Health Organisation has already warned that these are ideal conditions for disease to spread. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to support partners on the ground in Gaza to help prevent the outbreak and spread of disease?

Andrew Mitchell: ... There is a huge danger that, as a result of insufficient food, appalling sanitation and inadequate shelter—made worse by the winter rains—these conditions will persist, and that is why we are intent on trying to get the number of trucks that get into Gaza up to 500 a day. It is also why we have deployed this medical team, working with others, to see what can be done immediately on the ground.

Richard Foord (Liberal Democrat): The Israel Defence Forces chief spokesperson reflected on Saturday on the destruction of Hamas in the north of Gaza, before the IDF starts to tackle Hamas more seriously in the centre and the south. He said: "We will do this differently...based on the lessons we have learned from the fighting so far."

What confidence does the Minister have that Israel will conduct its counter-insurgency operations in such a way as to abide by international humanitarian law?

Andrew Mitchell: It is not for me to second-guess the military tactics of what is going on in Gaza...

Kit Malthouse (Conservative): Members of the Israeli Government have expressed their desire that settlers should return to Gaza at some point after the conflict. Away from the terrible massacre taking place in that awful conflict zone, the situation in the west bank continues to deteriorate. In a very welcome move, the UK Government announced that they would bring in travel bans on violent settlers, but does the Minister agree that in order to deter this activity, which is worsening by the day, something more draconian may be needed? Would he please look at instituting immediate bans on trade with settlements?

col 29 Andrew Mitchell: ... that is not the policy of the Government. ... we are opposed to boycotts, divestments and sanctions ...

Afzal Khan (Labour): Senior representatives of Israel continue to use language endorsing genocide against Palestinians. Prime Minister Netanyahu said that the IDF would turn Gaza into rubble, and a senior leader in the Israeli army has said that, in Gaza: "There will be no electricity and no water...there will only be destruction"

On LBC radio last week, the Israeli ambassador advocated the full destruction of Gaza and said that there was "no alternative". Last week, I wrote to the Foreign Secretary to ask him to condemn her genocidal words, but he refused. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... in respect of the humanitarian difficulties that he has identified, we are doing everything we can to try to secure unhindered humanitarian access, and we will continue to do so.

Julian Lewis (Conservative): Given that Hamas will never accept a two-state solution, does the Minister agree that any two-state solution must exclude Hamas—or any renamed successor—from any role in the government of Gaza after this horror is all over?

Andrew Mitchell: There is clearly no place in any future settlement for Hamas and their vile ideology and terrorist actions. ...

Zarah Sultana (Labour): Last week, when the Israeli ambassador was told she was making “an argument for destroying the whole of Gaza”, she replied, “do you have another solution...?”

Genocidal rhetoric like that has been echoed by a litany of Israeli officials and is matched by a murderous bombing campaign that has now killed more than 23,000 Palestinians. That is why Israel now faces the charge of genocide at the International Court of Justice. Will the Minister expel the Israeli ambassador for her genocidal rhetoric? ... will he end his Government’s complicity in this atrocity by banning arms sales to Israel ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we are pressing for a sustainable ceasefire as well as humanitarian causes ... In respect of the wider matter about international humanitarian law, the judgment that the Foreign Secretary made on 12 December on these matters still stands. There has been no additional evidence since that time to suggest otherwise.

col 30 **Stephen Crabb (Conservative):** Regarding the South African application into the International Court of Justice, our US allies have described it as “meritless, counterproductive and completely without any basis in fact”.

The Irish Prime Minister also appears to have distanced himself from it. Will my right hon. Friend say a bit more about his view on that application at the ICJ? Does he agree that using terms such as “genocide” is actually an inversion of the truth in this context?

Andrew Mitchell: I do think that using such inflammatory terms is unhelpful ...

My right hon. Friend, like me, will bear in mind that Israel is a state party to the Geneva convention of 1949, so it is obliged to take action against those accused of grave breaches of international humanitarian law. Because of the nature of Israeli society, that is something that we would expect it to do, were those circumstances to arise.

Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru): ... More than 23,000 people have died in Gaza since October and entire communities have been razed to the ground. While the International Court of Justice has a clear definition of genocide, there remains no legal definition of ethnic cleansing. Will the Government act to ensure a definition of ethnic cleansing in law so that this legal test may be applied to the conflict?

Andrew Mitchell: ... the central aim of the British Government today is to get relief and humanitarian supplies into Gaza, to help those who are trapped there ...

Vicky Ford (Conservative): Too many civilians and children have died. A sustainable ceasefire is needed urgently. There are concerns about malaria, scabies and other diseases, so as well as food and medicines will the Minister prioritise fuel for hospitals and health workers?

Andrew Mitchell: There has been an increase in the amount of fuel getting into Gaza, but my right hon. Friend is right that it needs to be distributed. ...

Naz Shah (Labour): More than 22,000 Palestinians have been killed, two thirds of them women and children. Our own Foreign Secretary has warned Israel that civilian deaths in Gaza are too high. Now a state has triggered the genocide convention, which will be determined by the International Court of Justice this week, yet Britain continues to grant weapons licences and to export weapons to Israel. ...

col 31 **Andrew Mitchell:** The hon. Lady will know that Britain has one of the toughest arms exports regulation regimes in the world. ...

Greg Smith (Conservative): Hamas leaders have long enjoyed impunity, moving freely between Turkey, Lebanon and Qatar, financing and amassing international support for their terror activities. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this special treatment by those

nations has resulted in Hamas accruing the capabilities that led to the barbaric, evil and, frankly, medieval 7 October massacre? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we must ensure that those who perpetrate the dreadful evil to which he refers are not able to do so again.

Clive Efford (Labour): ...The Secretary of State has indicated that he is in contact with the Israeli Government and is expressing the Government's views, but has he raised with them the prospect of widespread disease and famine among Palestinian people in Gaza? ...

Andrew Mitchell: These discussions ... are greatly assisted by the British Government's appointment of Mark Bryson-Richardson, the humanitarian co-ordinator. ...

Steve Double (Conservative): We all want a sustainable ceasefire that leads to a lasting peace, but it is easy to forget that a ceasefire existed between Israel and Hamas on 6 October, and we all know what happened the following day. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we need to work towards a sustainable ceasefire. We need yet more urgently humanitarian pauses, because in order for there to be a ceasefire, both parties must be willing to accept it. ...

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): ... 22,000 people already killed; 1.9 million displaced; thousands dying in the rubble; thousands of children dying because of a lack of medical care and food; and people dying of starvation, thirst and hunger in the Gaza strip at the present time. Can the Government not understand the anger around the world when they watch this happening in real time, and why so many people are very pleased that the Government of South Africa have taken the initiative by going to the International Court of Justice to hold Israel to account for the deaths of so many wholly innocent people in Gaza? ...

col/ 32 **Andrew Mitchell:** The policy of the Government—supported, I think, by those on the Opposition Front Bench—is to secure a sustainable ceasefire. The problem with the right hon. Gentleman's analysis, in my view, is that it does not take adequate account of the quite appalling events that took place on 7 October, when more Jewish people were murdered in a pogrom than at any time since the end of the second world war.

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): The Government have said that there will be consequences if Houthi attacks on international shipping continue. What will those consequences be, when will they start, and will they include both the Houthi rebels and their Iranian backers?

Andrew Mitchell: ... That point is separate from the conflict in Gaza, but she will have heard what the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary and the Foreign Secretary have said, and she will have heard those remarks echoed by our allies. ...

Khalid Mahmood (Labour): ... aid is still not getting through. There are not even sufficient bakeries to bake the bread for the people and ... disease is rife in Palestine. How are we going to support the innocent people that Hamas are using as shields, and that the IDF is also using to attack Hamas? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... the critical requirement is to ensure that we focus on getting additional support in. ...

Richard Fuller (Conservative): Recently, the Israeli ambassador to the UK very candidly said that there was absolutely no chance of a two-state solution. Has my right hon. Friend worked out whether the ambassador was speaking independently, or whether she was reflecting the views of the Israeli Government? ...

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend will have noted a variety of different comments that have been made by Israeli spokesmen and Israeli Ministers ...

col/ 33 **Stella Creasy (Labour Co-op):** ... It is clear that any sustainable ceasefire will have to involve an accountability mechanism for the allegations of war crimes, whether the

taking of hostages, rape or genocide. Now that there is the case before the International Court of Justice brought by South Africa, UK residents have a right to know the approach that their Government are taking to that. ...

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady is entirely right to talk about accountability mechanisms. ... I have made it clear at least twice that the British Government are absolutely supportive of that and do not want any culture of impunity to pertain afterwards. I have spelled out what the Government think about the reference to the international court. We respect the role of the international court, and we are following closely what is going on. It is up to the court to determine these matters. ...

Tom Hunt (Conservative): Last week, I visited Kfar Aza for the second time. ... When I was at the kibbutz last week, I felt it was the closest to evil that I had ever been. I met the families of some of the hostages. I know that the British Red Cross and UN organisations are active on the ground in trying to look after the welfare of children. However, that does not appear to extend to the hostages, one of whom is only 11 months old. ...

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right to identify the agony being felt by so many of the hostages' families, relations and loved ones. Some 130 hostages remain in Gaza, and we are working closely with more than 20 countries to help to secure their release. ...

Joanna Cherry (SNP): ... I agree with the Minister that it is for the court, not politicians, to decide whether there has been a genocide. However, if he has had time to look at South Africa's submission, does he at least agree that it seems, *prima facie*, that Israel has committed some serious breaches of international law in Gaza, for which it must be held accountable?

col 34 **Andrew Mitchell:** It is not for me to exercise that judgment. ...

Richard Graham (Conservative): I welcome the Government's role in sending more aid, securing the opening of the Kerem Shalom crossing and securing UN resolution 2720 ... How confident is he, however, that the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill will adequately reflect widespread concern about illegal and violent Israeli activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories?

Andrew Mitchell: ... The Government do not believe that public bodies should be able to waste public money pursuing their own foreign policy ...

Richard Burgon (Labour): Israel is committing war crimes on a daily basis in Gaza. ... South Africa is now taking forward a legal case against Israel in the International Court of Justice. If, as it could, that court quickly issues an order for Israel to immediately suspend its military operations, will the Government uphold that order by finally—finally—calling for an immediate ceasefire ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... the policy of an immediate ceasefire is not shared by either the Government or, indeed, those on the Opposition Front Bench. ...

Bob Blackman (Conservative): It is now almost 100 days since Hamas committed their evil atrocities in Israel. Also, 130 hostages are still held in captivity by Hamas terrorists. The international Red Cross has not had access to those hostages, the oldest of which are over 75 and the youngest under one year old. ...

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right to focus on the appalling agony and plight of the hostages. ...

col 35 **Jim Shannon (DUP):** The IDF claims that as many as 8,000 Hamas terrorists have been killed, while at the same time there are reports that Hamas are training children to take their place. The position of the more than 100 hostages still being held by Hamas looks incredibly precarious. Will the Minister outline what progress can be made and how the UK can ensure that those people can be released and Israel can be in a position to begin to seek peace? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... he sets out with great eloquence the issues and problems faced by the hostages in this appalling situation. ...

Mark Logan (Conservative): Before we reach a ceasefire ... two doctors in Bolton, Dr

Samir Naseet and Dr Ibrahim Hamami, have asked what preparations we are making to prepare the ground for the post-ceasefire period by leading on volunteer medical practitioners going to Gaza at that time?

Andrew Mitchell: ... I will take careful note of the point that he has made.

Debbie Abrahams (Labour): I think everybody here condemns the heinous attacks by Hamas on 7 October and the taking of hostages, and we all want their safe and immediate release. But that does not excuse the brutal, indiscriminate and disproportionate violence that the IDF are perpetrating on innocent Gazan civilians. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... the British Government are insistent that all parties must ensure that their actions are proportionate and necessary, and that they take account of civilian harm.

Siobhian Baillie (Conservative): ... Will he set out the conditions that are necessary for a sustainable ceasefire to be achieved?

col 36 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... A sustainable ceasefire is one that enables us to get relief into Gaza and we are doing everything we can to try to achieve that objective.

Rushanara Ali (Labour): The only way this war is likely to be brought to an end is through Government pressure—US pressure on the Israeli Government, and the Arab countries playing their part in applying pressure on Hamas. In the absence of such pressure, can the Minister, who has a good track record on campaigning against genocide, certainly in relation to the International Court of Justice case of The Gambia against Myanmar, look at how that ICJ case on genocide prevention can be used to apply pressure and prevent the Israeli Government from indiscriminate attacks on civilians?

Andrew Mitchell: ... I caution her against seeing any analogy between the Gambian-led case at the ICJ and the South African case over Israel and Gaza.

Flick Drummond (Conservative): National Security Minister Ben-Gvir issued a call to encourage the migration of Gaza residents as a solution to the crisis. Finance Minister Smotrich called for Palestinians to leave Gaza and make way for Israelis who could “make the desert bloom”. What steps have the UK Government taken to ensure that Palestinians will be able to return to their homes in Gaza as soon as conditions allow, in the light of those recent comments by Israeli Ministers and those by the Israeli ambassador to the UK, who called for Gazans to emigrate?

Andrew Mitchell: ... The Government have made it absolutely clear that there can be no resettlement of Palestinians outside of Gaza: those who lived in Gaza before must have the right of return and the British Government have been unequivocal on that point.

Beth Winter (Labour): The human suffering unfolding before our very eyes is absolutely horrific and heart breaking: tens of thousands of innocent Gazans losing their lives, 1.9 million displaced and only last week the Israeli National Security Minister talked about “the emigration of hundreds of thousands from Gaza”, as part of a post-war vision. Will the Minister condemn his Israeli counterpart for seeking to permanently displace Palestinians from their homes, confirm that Members of the Israeli Government are advocating for breaches of international law and agree that the actions of the Israeli state contravene the genocide convention? ...

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady ... is entirely right about the suffering ...

col 37 **Rob Butler (Conservative):** ... Will he reassure me ... that his Department will continue to keep food aid and medical aid to Gaza under review, and will redouble its efforts to work with neighbouring countries to ensure that aid gets where it is needed most?

Andrew Mitchell: Yes ... the contribution Britain is making is far more extensive and includes four air flights into el-Arish and the naval operation I described, in addition to what we seek to do in opening the new route from Jordan.

Gavin Newlands (SNP): Northern Gaza lies in ruins. ...

The Minister has said today that it is not for him to decide what is a war crime. Why are this Government so quick—and rightly—to condemn Russia’s war crimes, but not Israel’s

war crimes?

Andrew Mitchell: The British Government and indeed the Opposition stand up for international humanitarian law and condemn breaches of it whenever they take place. ...

Michael Ellis (Conservative): ... Is my right hon. Friend aware that South Africa is geopolitically moving towards Iran and openly supports Hamas? Indeed, its Foreign Secretary said that Israel does not even have the right to defend itself. It is in danger of becoming a terrorist proxy. As a former Attorney General, I can say that South Africa's case at The Hague has no legal merit whatsoever. Israel's actions are in lawful self-defence. ...

col 38 **Andrew Mitchell:** The South Africans are entitled under the rules to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice in the way that they have and, as I have repeatedly said, there will be different views across the House on whether it is helpful to do so at this stage. ... South Africa is a pluralist democracy and there are many different voices that come out of it. Britain has a close, deep and abiding historical relationship with South Africa ...

Andy Slaughter (Labour): The Minister says Israeli military action should be targeted on Hamas leaders and operatives. He knows better than anyone that it is not. ... What steps are the Government taking to restrain Israel from breaking international law, and will he concede that ending trade with illegal settlements is, as a matter of fact and law, unrelated to boycott, divestment and sanctions?

Andrew Mitchell: ... Those arguments and discussions are going on, and above all we make the point that people must abide by international humanitarian law.

Colum Eastwood (SDLP): Last week the Israeli ambassador in London said the quiet bit out loud when she implied that the Israeli Government are trying to totally destroy the Gaza strip. Has the Foreign Secretary hauled her in to explain that this Government oppose that policy ...

Andrew Mitchell: The British Government make their views very clear at all times ...

Alison McGovern (Labour): Whatever the rhetoric we still sometimes hear, I know the Minister will agree that there is absolutely nowhere in this conflict that is safe for children. ... may I ask him to spell out how his humanitarian strategy, and the aid that he is trying to get in to the area, will respond to the desperate needs of the children who are affected?

col 39 **Andrew Mitchell:** We are trying to ensure that 500 trucks a day get in to provide the humanitarian aid the hon. Lady is talking about. We are also trying to do everything we can to ensure that there is additional health and hospital capacity inside Gaza, as well as just outside; we do not think it is sensible for people to be taken offshore, but they need to be treated inside Gaza where possible. ...

Andrew Bridgen (Independent): ... does the Minister still believe that the Israel Defence Forces response to the 7 October atrocities, in which 1,200 Israeli citizens were murdered, remains proportionate?

Andrew Mitchell: I really do not think that the equation that the hon. Gentleman makes between barbaric death in that way is one that stands very close scrutiny. ...

Rupa Huq (Labour): Every time pleas are made to exercise restraint, Netanyahu doubles down, so that 22,000 mostly women and child deaths and non-functioning hospitals have now become the norm. Two of his Ministers say that the forcibly evicted Palestinians can resettle elsewhere—that is ethnic cleansing. Are we not just greenlighting a leader who was already unpopular before all this and who cares less about pinpoint accuracy and international law, as he promised, than clinging on now as a war hero?

Andrew Mitchell: The longevity or otherwise of the Prime Minister of Israel is a matter for the Israeli people. ...

Stephen Farry (Alliance): It is not good enough for the Government to keep calling for Israel to abide by international and humanitarian law when there is overwhelming evidence

that it is not. By contrast, the Government have been very clear that Russia has been breaching international humanitarian law in Ukraine and have called out the bombing of civilians—indeed, the bombing of a children’s playground. Why the double standards? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we are always standing up for international humanitarian law; it does not matter where there are breaches. ...

col 40 Stephen Timms (Labour): The Minister has supported a two-state solution, with Gaza under Palestinian control, but the proposals tabled last week by the Israeli Defence Minister are very different, envisaging a subsidiary status of some kind for Palestine. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... a number of proposals are being generated ... But the critical thing is that, when this dreadful conflict ceases, there will be a moment for the political track to assert itself. ... the progress made at Oslo followed the second intifada. We must pray that when this dreadful conflict is over there will be an opportunity for a strong political track to assert itself.

Karen Buck (Labour): The Minister himself acknowledged that the spectre of famine is stalking Gaza. ... how many trucks actually went through in the last 24 hours? Is it true that in some cases trucks are waiting up to 15 days for clearance and that trucks are taken out of the convoy of aid because one item has failed security checks? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... Currently, around 150 trucks a day are getting in. ... That is ... entirely inadequate, but we are trying to make sure that the number rises to 500. Although I said in my opening remarks that there is a fear of famine, it is not our assessment at the moment that famine has arrived. But there is acute starvation and hunger, and it is that that we are trying to combat at this stage.

Owen Thompson (SNP): ... What definition of proportionate, targeted and minimising are the Government applying if they consider the actions of Israel to be in compliance with all of those? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we are working towards achieving a sustainable ceasefire. In the run-up to that, we want to see humanitarian pauses that are as long and as immediate as possible. ...

Margaret Greenwood (Labour): On 11 December, along with other parliamentarians, I heard the harrowing eyewitness account of Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah, a British-Palestinian surgeon who had recently returned from Gaza. ...

col 41 He spoke of treating children, who he believes had phosphorus burns, with washing up liquid and vinegar, and without painkillers. He believes that medical teams need to be allowed to set up in-field hospitals, and that the most critically injured patients need to be allowed to leave Gaza. On 7 January, Israeli authorities denied a request by the World Health Organisation to deliver urgent medical supplies to the central drug store in Gaza city and al-Awda Hospital. Will the Government put pressure on Israel to allow the delivery of those vital supplies ...

Andrew Mitchell: I have set out the reasons why calling for a permanent ceasefire is not, in our opinion, the right way to proceed. ...

Kirsten Oswald (SNP): We know that women and children make up about 70% of the more than 22,000 people who have been killed in Gaza. That is a horrific number, and should be called such. We know that the 7 October attacks saw women and young people bear the terrible brunt of the violence, which continues. ... Does the Minister recognise the particular impact on innocent women and children, and the urgent need, therefore, for a ceasefire to protect them now and in the future? ...

Andrew Mitchell: I recognise entirely what the hon. Lady says about the plight of innocent women and children caught up in these horrendous circumstances. ...

James Murray (Labour Co-op): The suffering in Gaza over the last three months has been intolerable. ... We urgently need to get to a sustainable ceasefire. Beyond that, a long-term peace will need a determined international effort to deliver a two-state solution, with Gaza as part of a future Palestinian state. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... The British Government, at the diplomatic and political levels,

through ministerial engagement not just in Israel but throughout the middle east, are seeking to advance precisely the objectives that he so coherently put.

col 42 Clive Betts (Labour): Has the Minister made clear to the Israeli Government his criticism of the comments of the Israeli ambassador in which she explicitly rejected a two-state solution ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... there are many different voices coming out of Israel. It was perhaps a matter of surprise that the ambassador chose to express herself at this point in precisely that way, but he will be aware that the policy of the British Government is to support a two-state solution. ...

Jonathan Edwards (Independent): The Israeli Government have demanded full control of the Philadelphi corridor, the land border between Gaza and Egypt. ... it is the main aid corridor for UK and international aid into Gaza. The Egyptian Government are reportedly opposed to the proposal due to the effect on the country's sovereignty, so how concerned are the British Government about the Israeli Government's demands in respect of the Philadelphi corridor?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman will have seen the progress that has been made on other forms of access. ...

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour): The level of death and destruction in Gaza is horrifying and completely unacceptable, including bombings of a refugee camp on Christmas eve, which even the Israeli Government have admitted were grave errors. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we are seeking humanitarian pauses, and we hope that we can reach a sustainable ceasefire. ... Israel has an absolute right to exercise self-defence, but it must do so within international humanitarian law.

col 43 Toby Perkins (Labour): Young women just out of school remain in captivity, facing rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war by Hamas, and we know that Hamas remain a barrier, rather than a conduit, towards a two-state solution. On the other side, senior politicians and the Israeli ambassador now feel the confidence to be able to declare that a two-state solution is off the table ... Does he not share my fear that his refusal to condemn the comments of the Israeli ambassador, and his continuing to say that we support international law when it is clear that it is being broken, will give the Israelis the sense that, secretly, we support the approach they are taking? ...

Andrew Mitchell: Nothing secret is engaged here. We have been very clear about exactly where we stand, even when it is not very popular across the House: we will stand up for a sustainable ceasefire, seek to get a political track and use Britain's diplomatic skills and clout, which are much respected in the region, to try to approach a political settlement that honours the two-state solution. ...

Emma Hardy (Labour): It was pleasing to hear the Minister say that Gaza must be run by Palestinians and that there should be no forced resettlement of Palestinians. ...

Andrew Mitchell: Throughout all the difficulties, there has been a solid, constant refrain that there has to be a two-state solution, with both Israel and Palestine living in peace behind secure borders. ...

Patrick Grady (SNP): Over Christmas, I heard from a constituent whose sister and her sister's four children are stuck in Gaza. If there were a ceasefire, it might be easier for them to leave Gaza. If the UK were prepared to offer humanitarian visas to relatives of UK citizens who are in Gaza, it might be easier for them to leave. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... if the hon. Gentleman wishes to discuss it with me after this urgent question, I would be happy to see him. He will know that 300 British nationals have been able to leave, thanks not least to the hard work of the brilliant young men and women who are working in the emergency centre at the Foreign Office in London. ...

col 44 Andrew Gwynne (Labour): ... The sad truth is that Prime Minister Netanyahu never really supported Oslo and a two-state solution, and Hamas definitely do not. ... For those of us who do believe in Oslo, in the peace process and in two states for two peoples, what

happens next really matters. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... Britain wants to support the Palestinian Authority in further developing the sinews of statehood that will be required if there is to be a two-state solution ... it is now for Britain and other countries to do everything we can to develop those abilities within the Palestinian Authority so that they can properly exercise power, governance and representation in Gaza in due course.

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op): In the light of Tzipi Hotovely's statement on LBC radio that the destruction of Gaza should continue and be extensive, why have the Government not condemned those words ...

Andrew Mitchell: No one wants to see wanton destruction, which is why I have been very clear about international humanitarian law. I also hope the hon. Lady would assert that, given the horrendous events of 7 October, Israel has a right to self-defence. That is what Israel is seeking to exercise in tracking down Hamas and stopping their ability to repeat what they did on 7 October, as Hamas's leaders have made clear they wish to do.

Kevin Brennan (Labour): ... What chance can there be for the humanitarian truce that is needed now, and for a sustainable ceasefire and a lasting peace, when extremist views are uttered not just by terrorist organisations but by some Ministers and diplomats representing the Israeli Government?

Andrew Mitchell: Many wild statements have been made ... but the British Government's purpose is to achieve a sustainable ceasefire and to meet the immense humanitarian need. ...

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (SNP): ... when Israeli Ministers Smotrich and Ben-Gvir said that Gaza should be essentially free of Palestinians, the Government, along with European counterparts, correctly condemned them, but when the ambassador in London called for Gaza to be flattened even more than it already has been, they say nothing. Why?

col 45 **Andrew Mitchell:** I have explained the Government policy in some detail both in respect of tackling the humanitarian need that so manifestly exists and in developing the political track when this conflict is over ...

Emma Lewell-Buck (Labour): The UN has described Gaza as a "graveyard for children"; it is reported that more than 9,000 have been killed and thousands more severely injured. Those children who have survived face a bleak future, with limited access to aid as bombs continue to rain down on them. Many have lost their parents and their entire families. ... can he explain in more detail why the Government support unaccompanied children fleeing Ukraine but cannot set up similar support for children in Gaza?

Andrew Mitchell: I do not think that the two situations are analogous, but I do think it is very important that we do everything we can to help the children ...

Cat Smith (Labour): ... we know that children are seven times more likely than adults to be killed by blast injuries and that 1,000 children have lost one or both legs in the last three months in Gaza. The scars that Gazan children are bearing from this war will be long-lasting ...

Andrew Mitchell: The plight of Gazan children will weigh heavily on all decent people on all sides of the argument ...

col 46 **Matt Western (Labour):** After almost 23,000 civilian deaths, including almost 10,000 children, many observers are describing the atrocity in Gaza as a genocide. ... last week we heard Bezalel Smotrich, the Finance Minister, describing the need for voluntary emigration from Gaza and Israeli occupation and resettlement of Gaza, and we heard Prime Minister Netanyahu and Ambassador Hotovely describing what they want to see, which is the outright destruction of Hamas and the Palestinian people. I think we need to be honest: when Netanyahu calls for a total victory, he wants to see the annihilation of the Palestinian people, doesn't he?

Andrew Mitchell: I do not think that a close observation of Mr Netanyahu's remarks would sustain that view. ...

Mary Kelly Foy (Labour): ... Is the Minister aware that before Christmas a sniper murdered two women—a mother and a daughter—inside the Holy Family parish in Gaza? The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem stated that the women “were shot in cold blood inside the premises of the parish, where there are no belligerents”. Pope Francis has condemned the attack, as has the Archbishop of Westminster; will the Government do so?

Andrew Mitchell: We are not clear about the full facts of what happened. We have of course heard what the Holy Father has said and what others have said as well, but the fact that any innocent person loses their life in these horrendous circumstances is something which the whole House will deplore.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-08/debates/AFB7B263-C4D4-4B7E-B7B3-EED39C534A63/IsraelAndPalestine>

UNSC Resolution 2720, referred to above, can be read at
[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

UNSC Resolution 1701, referred to above, can be read at
[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1701\(2006\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1701(2006))

The Scottish First Minister’s comments referred to above can be read at
<https://twitter.com/HumzaYousaf/status/1743314833070547224>

The South African application to the International Court of Justice instituting proceedings against Israel can be read at
<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20231228-app-01-00-en.pdf>

Israel: Terrorist Attacks

Theresa Villiers (Conservative) [900863] What steps [the Minister] is taking to support Israel in preventing terrorist attacks.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Grant Shapps): We have provided intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance to help anticipate any further attacks and to assist with hostage recovery.

Theresa Villiers: Some 100,000 people have been displaced from their homes in northern Israel because of the fear that if Hezbollah adopt the same tactics as Hamas, the carnage could be even worse than on 7 October. What are the UK Government doing to try to prevent more weapons from getting to Hezbollah, to de-escalate the situation and to see, at the very least, Hezbollah retreat further north from the border?

Grant Shapps: I thank my right hon. Friend. We are working alongside our P3 partners to de-escalate tensions on the blue line and reduce that risk of escalation. We are continuing our efforts to support the resilience of the Lebanese armed forces, who we have helped elsewhere, with the eventual aim of getting them to the Lebanese southern border and ensuring implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1701.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-08/debates/E0145158-5454-465B-8AA4-D943EE5440D9/IsraelTerroristAttacks>

The UNSC Resolution referred to above can be read at
[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1701\(2006\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1701(2006))

Gaza: UK Aid

Beth Winter (Labour) [900856] What steps [the Minister] is taking to support the delivery of UK aid to Gaza.

Kerry McCarthy (Labour) [900867] What steps [the Minister] is taking to support the delivery of UK aid to Gaza.

Andrew Gwynne (Labour) [900868] What steps [the Minister] is taking to support the delivery of UK aid to Gaza.

The Minister for Armed Forces (James Heapey): ... In support of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the first maritime delivery of UK aid arrived in Egypt at new year. RFA Lyme Bay and four RAF aircraft have positioned over 150 tonnes of humanitarian aid into Egypt. Distribution of the aid has been impeded by challenges around its movement into Gaza. FCDO colleagues continue to work with the UN, Israel and Egypt to allow greater volumes of aid to be delivered.

Beth Winter: ... On 29 December an aid convoy belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency was hit by Israeli gunfire, despite the vehicles being identifiable with the agency's markings and after the IDF had designated the route from Gaza City in earlier co-ordination. Given Israel's targeting of aid convoys, can the Minister say whether the Ministry of Defence maintains a tracker database of alleged breaches or violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza, as it has previously said it does for Yemen?

James Heapey: I will have to write to the hon. Lady on her exact point about the tracker. I am not aware of one, but that does not necessarily mean there is not one. I will write to her.

Although humanitarian aid is a Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office lead, we continue to work with partners and allies to advocate for other crossings to be opened and to increase the volume of aid delivered into Gaza.

Kerry McCarthy: I welcome the news that RFA Lyme Bay has delivered aid to Egypt, so it is very disappointing to know that aid is still being held up. Given Israel's activity in Gaza, the only way we can make sure that humanitarian aid gets to the people who need it is by trying to secure another cessation in hostilities. What role is the MOD playing in trying to make that happen?

James Heapey: The MOD has put its shoulder to the wheel in support of the Government's wider diplomatic effort but, obviously, the negotiation of a pause such as the one that the hon. Lady rightly says is necessary to deliver aid in greater volumes is a Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office lead. Mr Speaker, I believe you have had the foresight to grant an urgent question in which such questions may well be answered shortly by a Minister from that Department.

Andrew Gwynne: We are witnessing horrific scenes in Gaza. The humanitarian catastrophe there needs greater focus from countries like our own and others around the world, to bring it to an end and to get that aid in. Given that the Prime Minister said in a statement before Prorogation that we would use British armed forces capability to make those shipments of aid in greater numbers, why are we not getting those greater numbers of aid in? What is he doing to get Israel to open the crossings and to get that aid in, in the quantities that are needed?

James Heapey: British armed forces are being used to deliver aid into Gaza, and they have done so to good effect. My right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary has struck up an excellent operational relationship with his Israeli counterpart, which has allowed for the opening of the Kerem Shalom crossing. Again, I think that is a reflection of the success of the UK's engagement with the Israeli Government on this matter.

The volumes of aid are limited not by the availability of military capacity—there is plenty of that—but by the availability of crossings and the ability to distribute the aid, on which Foreign Office colleagues are working closely with the UN, Israel, Egypt and others to increase.

Flick Drummond (Conservative): ... France and Jordan successfully delivered medical aid to Gaza by air last week. Has the Minister considered the viability of the UK air-dropping food and medical supplies to Gaza in the same way?

James Heapey: I think air dropping is a very imprecise way of doing business. Our preference is to seek maritime routes.

Philip Hollobone (Conservative): Is a feasibility study being undertaken to see whether aid could be delivered directly into Gaza from ship to shore, should the future security situation allow it?

James Heapey: The Defence Secretary has led internationally on exactly such an initiative, working with our friends in the Cypriot Ministry of Defence. There are ideas to do exactly that, but they obviously need to be agreed with all parties before they can happen.

Mark Logan (Conservative): I have urgently pressed the Minister and the Department to secure Red sea vessels, as well as facilitating aid into Gaza. People in Bolton are demanding assurances on both maritime safety and humanitarian support for Gaza. What assurances can he provide to people in Bolton?

James Heapey: Clearly, the delivery of aid into Gaza is principally a maritime and aviation effort in the eastern Mediterranean, but my hon. Friend is correct to say that the security of shipping in the Red sea also has an impact. That is why Royal Navy warships are part of the Red sea taskforce that is seeking to protect those sea lanes.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-08/debates/7BC87261-9B0B-41E2-883C-4B3A78B23658/GazaUKAid>

The Prime Minister's statement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-23/debates/018D96AB-5D91-48D7-9809-19A03E54125A/IsraelAndGaza>

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Sanctions

Andy Slaughter (Labour) [7299] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will apply Magnitsky-style sanctions to Israel's (a) Minister of National Security and (b) Finance Minister in the context of settler violence in the West Bank.

Andrew Mitchell: Tensions in the West Bank must ease and we continue to urge Israel to address extremist settler violence. This includes preventing such acts of violence, and holding those responsible to account. The Foreign Secretary has announced that we will ban those responsible for settler violence from entering the UK. We keep our sanctions under review and reserve the right to introduce further measures.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7299>

Israel: Palestinians

Philippa Whitford (SNP) [7340] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Israel on the location of the four Palestinian health workers who have been detained since 22 November 2023.

Andrew Mitchell: We are aware of reports over Israeli detention practices. We are particularly concerned over reports about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention, which should be used only where it is justified in accordance with international law. Those under detention should either be charged or released. The UK is committed to working with Israel to secure improvements in its detention practices and repeatedly calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law. This has been repeatedly raised by both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary with Prime Minister Netanyahu. The safety of humanitarian personnel and healthcare workers in Gaza is critical to enable aid to reach those who need it most. The FCDO is actively engaging with international partners and

those operating on the ground to do all we can to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7340>

House of Lords Written Answers

Gaza: Ceasefires

Lord Blencathra (Conservative) [HL1328] To ask His Majesty's Government why the UK did not vote against the UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza on 8 December 2023.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK abstained on the 08 December UNSCR resolution, which called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, because it is the government's view that, for a ceasefire to be sustainable, the conditions need to be in place for it to not rapidly collapse. The Government recognises the need to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis however, and welcomes the adoption of UNSCR 2720, which calls for expanded humanitarian access in Gaza. The resolution also calls for steps towards a sustainable ceasefire, reflecting the recent calls from the Foreign Secretary. We want to see a peaceful resolution to this conflict as soon as possible and the UK will work with international partners to ensure the implementation of this resolution.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/hl1328>

The proposed but unadopted 8 December UNSC resolution referred to above can be read at <https://undocs.org/en/S/2023/970>

UNSC Resolution 2720, referred to above, can be read at [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

The following two questions both received the same answer

Awni Khattab

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green) [HL1249] To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made, if any, to the government of Israel regarding the detention of Awni Khattab, Head of the Palestine Red Crescent Society's Ambulance Center in Khan Younis, by Israeli forces on 22 November.

Israel: Gaza

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green) [HL1250] To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made, if any, to the government of Israel regarding the detention of two Palestine Red Crescent Society staff by Israeli authorities in Gaza on 9 December while delivering supplies to Al Ahli hospital as part of a UN convoy.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: It is the longstanding policy of successive UK Governments that we do not comment on individual cases. However, we are particularly concerned over reports about Israeli detention practices. The Government is clear that administrative detention should be used only where it is justified in accordance with international law. Those under detention should either be charged or released. The UK is committed to working with Israel to secure improvements in its detention practices and repeatedly calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law. This has been repeatedly raised by both the PM and the Foreign Secretary with PM Netanyahu. The safety of humanitarian personnel and healthcare workers in Gaza is critical to enable aid to reach those who need it most. The FCDO is actively engaging with international partners and those operating on the ground to do all we can to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/hl1249>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/hl1250>

Israel and Lebanon: Christianity

Lord Patten (Conservative) [HL1287] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the safety of the Christian Aramaean communities on the Israel–Lebanon border.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is actively monitoring the Blue Line boundary between Israel and Lebanon, and engaging closely with partners across the region. We are a strong supporter of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and call for places of worship to be respected. Israel and Lebanon have made clear their commitment to freedom of religion, and we encourage both Governments to do all that they can to uphold the values of equality for all enshrined in their laws. Our Embassies in Tel Aviv and Beirut, and our Consulate General in Jerusalem regularly raise issues of religious freedom with the Israeli and Lebanese Governments.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/hl1287>

Foreign Affairs Committee

Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Q593 Bob Seely (Conservative): ... Can I just double-check, Foreign Secretary, what our objectives are in relation to Israel and Gaza?

Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton (Foreign Secretary): Our objective above everything is to try and help achieve some stability in the Middle East. In the short term, our goal is to see an end to this conflict, but our longer-term goal is that we believe that there will not be true security, either for Israel or for the Palestinians, without moving towards a two-state solution. ...

Q594 Bob Seely: ... are we doing anything like, for example, developing a road map or a peace plan with some of our Arab friends in the Middle East—Egypt, the UAE and other countries?

Lord Cameron: Yes, we are. ...

Fundamentally, four things have to happen. Once this conflict is over, we have to see a Palestinian-led Government in Gaza and the West Bank. We need a concrete plan of support for that Government, and a plan to help reform and support the Palestinian Authority. We have to see a massive reconstruction plan for Gaza after this conflict is over, and crucially, we have to see a political horizon towards a two-state solution. The way I see it, you won't get the sort of assistance needed on security, governance and technical help in Gaza after the conflict unless you can convince the Palestinian authorities, the Palestinian people and Arab states that you have a longer-term horizon towards a two-state solution.

Q595 Bob Seely: Do you think that is remotely feasible ...

Lord Cameron: Yes. ... Out of a crisis should come some opportunity. What is interesting is that from all the conversations I have had—with the Jordanians, the Egyptians, the Emiratis, the Saudis—it seems an awful lot of people would accept those four planks of a plan, in one form or another, going together.

Q596 Bob Seely: Does our current position damage our friendships with Arab nations?

Lord Cameron: Fundamentally, I would say that it does not. Definitely there is stress there, because of course the Arab states all want to see, or have called for, an immediate ceasefire. They are deeply concerned, as I am, by what is happening in Gaza and the loss of life. To sit here and argue that saying that we want a sustainable ceasefire has had no

effect on our relations I think would be stretching it, but I would say that they understand that we are not being deliberately difficult or obtuse about this. We are just very classically British, common-sense, practical people, and I cannot see a comprehensive ceasefire coming in now, while Hamas are still able to launch rockets out of Gaza. ... While those states might be a bit disappointed in our position, I think they understand it, and recognise that it does at least make internal logical sense. ...

Q597 Dan Carden (Labour): ... Josep Borrell has stated that the EU's position on Gaza-Israel has damaged the EU's relationship with the Global South, and leaked US cables have said similar. Do you feel that the same goes for the UK?

Lord Cameron: Certainly, there are countries in the Global South, or however you want to term it, that want an immediate ceasefire, and disagree with people who do not. ... so perhaps your standing with them will suffer in some way ... When I meet a South African Foreign Minister, for instance, I would say, "Look, I want this conflict to end as soon as possible. I don't want it to go on for a moment longer than necessary, but for a ceasefire to work, it has to be sustainable. That means that you can't have Hamas in power able to launch rockets and not releasing hostages. ..."

Q598 Dan Carden: Do you believe that military intervention can defeat Hamas?

Lord Cameron: What the Israelis are trying to do is get rid of Hamas' ability to launch further attacks on Israel. I think you can do that. One can disagree—and I would have differences with them—on the way that they have gone about it. Can you defeat an ideology though armed intervention? No. ... But if you take the argument that there is nothing more that can be done militarily—you just have to freeze things where we are now—you then have to make an argument for how you get the remainder of Hamas out of Gaza, and get rid of the rocket launchers. ...

Q599 Dan Carden: How will you know when that moment has come ...

Lord Cameron: ... what we did is we defined what we wanted as a sustainable ceasefire. The Prime Minister said that at Prime Minister's questions, and within a few weeks, that was adopted by the UN in resolution 2720 ...

Of course, we spend a lot of time asking what Israel should do next to bring this to an end, to a finish. We should also spend a nanosecond saying that if Hamas wanted, they could end this tomorrow; they could lay down their arms; they could leave Gaza. They are the ones prolonging this conflict, in many ways.

Q600 Dan Carden: You have warned against an unsustainable ceasefire that quickly collapses into further violence, but there is a strong feeling, I think, in the international community and among the public, that the longer the violence continues and the further away peace is, the more we are going to struggle to get to peace.

Lord Cameron: I don't disagree with that. ...

First of all, I would be in favour of humanitarian pauses ... Let us have another pause to try and get hostages out and to get more aid in. ... What I am saying about a sustainable ceasefire is that it does need Hamas to no longer be capable of launching attacks into Israel—otherwise, it is not sustainable ...

Q601 Chair (Alicia Kearns, Conservative): ... what is the UK's current legal position on whether or not Gaza is occupied?

Lord Cameron: Our position is that Israel is fighting a campaign against Hamas. We have to check regularly whether that is in compliance with international humanitarian law and assess that. I do not think Israel regards itself as an occupying force, but, on whether that is correct, I would want to take legal advice ...

Q602 Chair: ... we know that Israel does not consider itself to be an occupying power, but British law currently does consider Gaza to be an occupied territory. ...

Lord Cameron: I don't know the precise legal definition of that ...

Q603 Chair: ...I think we all know that the Foreign Office does know what the official legal

position is.

Sir Philip Barton (Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office): We describe the territories as “the Occupied Palestinian Territories” ... that’s a descriptor. I think we should give you a piece of written advice on the legal position.

Lord Cameron: I think what the Chair is asking is: do we consider Gaza to be occupied, militarily, at the moment? ...

Q604 Chair: I am asking for the British Government’s legal definition—whatever they consider to be the terminology of “occupied”—because, as I understand it, there is no question but that, in law, so under British law and according to the UN Security Council resolution 2334, on which we have based our legal position, Gaza is an occupied territory. Therefore, from that, Israel does have obligations as an occupying power. Whether or not they consider themselves to be one or not ... I would consider it to be quite fundamental that we knew exactly from what premise we were operating when engaging with something so complex.

Lord Cameron: Well, as you know, we refer to them as the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but obviously Gaza was left by Israel. But I think the question you’re asking now is, “Is what Israel has done technically an occupation, and, therefore, do they have a legal obligation?” The point I would make is—look, whether or not they are de jure occupying, they are de facto occupying Gaza and therefore, when it comes to this issue of aid delivery, we need them to do more.

At the moment, we are at about 150 trucks a day getting into Gaza. We need to be closer to 500. Every day that we are not closer to 500, we are going to have more people going hungry; we are going to have more people getting disease. ...

Q605 Chair: ... Just for clarification, therefore, in your words, Gaza is “de facto” occupied and therefore Israel has obligations as an occupying power ...

Lord Cameron: I am saying they have. I am not a lawyer. I need to be careful—I am saying that they have responsibilities—

Q606 Chair: But you are saying that they have not met their obligations.

Lord Cameron: I am saying that they have got responsibilities to make sure that aid gets through. It is not solely them. I have been to el-‘Arīsh myself. There are problems with Egyptian bureaucracy. ...

Q607 Chair: But de facto they are occupying and they are not currently doing all they could be doing on aid and therefore what they should be doing?

Lord Cameron: I want them to do more.

Q608 Graham Stringer (Labour): ... I represent a very large Jewish community and a very large Muslim community. Both communities are both angry and fearful about what is happening in Israel and Gaza. Is there anything you can do as Foreign Secretary to help the tension that those communities are feeling? ...

Lord Cameron: I am. I think everybody can feel it ... One of the most important things with both communities, but perhaps most importantly with British Muslims, is to demonstrate that we are an aid superpower that is doing what an aid superpower should be doing and getting aid into Gaza. ...

With the Jewish community, it is partly about demonstrating an understanding of just what a catastrophic event—what an appalling event—7 October was. Sometimes people can forget, because of what has happened subsequently, the scale of it. If you look at a country the size of Israel, to lose over 1,400 people in one day, in those most horrific circumstances—I have been to Kibbutz Be’eri and seen with my own eyes where children were shot in front of their parents, where people were raped, the blood on the floor and the bullet holes in the wall. It is something you are never going to forget. This happened to a country that is a friend of ours, and they are peace-loving people in these kibbutzes.

Showing understanding—that we understand why they feel so strongly about that event—and trying to put ourselves in their shoes is really important.

Q609 Graham Stringer: ... How many UK citizens remain in Gaza and, in particular, in the north of Gaza? ...

Q610 Lord Cameron: I know there are two who want to get out who do not have any security clearance problems but have not yet got out. What I do not have ... is that we think that there are still quite a number of British nationals or dual nationals who are in Gaza but who haven't asked to leave. ...

Sir Philip Barton: We cannot give you a precise number ...

Q611 Chair: ... Alex Chalk gave precise numbers on 7 November, when he said that 100 Brits had left Gaza and 100 were still in the country...

Lord Cameron: ... I think most of those 100 have left. The ones we do not know about are those who have not declared and do not necessarily want to leave. ...

Q612 Sir Philip Barton: It is more than 300 now, people registered with us—British nationals and their dependants—have left with our assistance. ...

Q613 Graham Stringer: Can you be specific about the number of UK nationals who remain as hostages?

Lord Cameron: Yes, there are two British nationals that remain as hostages. ...

Q614 Graham Stringer: Do we know they are alive?

Lord Cameron: I just do not want to say any more. ... There are also, of course, people very connected to Britain who are also hostages, and we are doing everything we can to try to help in both cases.

Q615 Graham Stringer: How many hostages have we managed to get back to the UK?

Lord Cameron: I do not have the figures ...

Q616 Chair: ... How many British nationals have been brought back who were hostages held by Hamas or Palestinian jihad? ...

Sir Philip Barton: Israel is obviously taking the lead, in conjunction with international partners, including the UK, in trying to secure the release of hostages. ...

Q617 Chair: ... we met Roger Carstens, who is the US hostage negotiator. He can tell me at a minute's notice the names of all the American hostages who are still being held by Hamas ... He can most certainly tell me how many have been brought back to the US. How many have been brought back to the UK who had UK citizenship?

Sir Philip Barton: There are two, as the Foreign Secretary said, who have British nationality who were hostages, and there are others who are connected to the UK through family ties. The answer to your question about "brought back to the UK by the UK Government", I would have to confirm—

Q618 Chair: I don't really care who brought them back: I care about British nationals who were held hostage. How many have been brought back?

Sir Philip Barton: Let me confirm afterwards. I will speak for myself rather than for the Foreign Secretary: I don't think there are any.

Q619 Graham Stringer: So the answer is zero.

Lord Cameron: I think that is right.

Q620 Chair: ... As you understand it at the moment, no British nationals are being held by Hamas. I understand why you feel you may not be able to share how many there are for various reasons, but no one has been able to be brought home as yet.

Lord Cameron: That is right. ... but there are people who have been taken hostage who are deeply connected ... sister of, brother of, son of, and we must do everything we can for them." When we get to that category, there are people who are connected to British citizens who have been released.

Q621 Chair: Do we know how many?

Lord Cameron: No ... Of the British nationals, two, and none have been released.

Q622 Graham Stringer: ... are you able to assess the threat to British hostages from the IDF bombardment in the area, and have you made any specific representations to the IDF or the Israeli Government to protect those hostages?

Lord Cameron: We raise the issue—not just the British hostages, but the hostages connected to Britain and the hostages more generally—every time we speak with Israeli Ministers. ... in Israel itself there is a huge lobby on behalf of the hostages, wanting to get the hostages home and to save the hostages. ...

Q623 Chair: ... I would be interested in your assessment of Hamas's current capability, how much it has been degraded and what their intent is.

Lord Cameron: ... I've seen figures suggesting that they have lost well over 50% of their capacity and their capability in terms of being able to launch rockets and all the rest of it; I don't think I can go further than that. ...

Q624 Chair: The Israelis said over the weekend that they have now dismantled Hamas's military infrastructure in the north of Gaza. ... Is that not perhaps an opportunity to bring in a humanitarian pause in the north of Gaza? ...

Lord Cameron: ... What we have pushed for with Israel is to say, "Consider humanitarian pauses." We have not particularly focused on an individual area. Most Gazans have moved from the north to the south, so it is more helpful to have a humanitarian pause covering the whole of Gaza, because then you can get the aid to where most people are, but, frankly, anything would help. In fact, one issue we would like the Israelis to look at is switching the water back on into northern Gaza, because that would make a difference. It is about all those things ...

Q625 Chair: One challenge is that as yet there has been no safe place that they could go, so perhaps that suggestion could provide an avenue. ...

President Biden has said that "indiscriminate" bombings have taken place. On 23 November, you warned that civilian casualties in Gaza were "too high" and that Israel must abide by international humanitarian law. How have you, as Foreign Secretary, achieved a reduction in civilian casualties?

Lord Cameron: What we have done on every occasion of talking, whether to the Israeli Prime Minister or President, or to Minister Dermer or Minister Gantz ... is always make the point that of course we believe Israel has a right to defend itself and to deal with the Hamas threat, but it has to do so within international humanitarian law and it should try to avoid civilian casualties. ...

Q626 Chair: ... Do we think that the UK or the US ... have been unable to restrain Israel in any way, in terms of the way it has conducted its airstrikes?

Lord Cameron: ... I think the relentless pressure that Israel felt—from us, the Americans and others—over opening the Kerem Shalom crossing did make a difference. They eventually relented. ...

Q627 Chair: ... when I asked the Prime Minister about the same topic, he said that he had not seen Israel's targeting. Have we asked to see Israel's targeting process or procedures?

Lord Cameron: I haven't seen it.

Chair: Have we asked to see it?

Lord Cameron: I haven't asked to see it. I don't think that that is something that they would share with us.

Q628 Chair: But they would share their collateral damage percentage that they are working to, if we asked them to do so.

Lord Cameron: They have certainly shared that, in that they point out—but one can say this is arguable—that their collateral damage percentage compared with other conflicts

shows that they are taking the issue of civilian casualties very seriously ...

Q629 Chair: I think it is a good way of holding them to account. ... I believe ... that the UK normally operates at around 3% collateral damage ... Israel must be operating at 20% or 30%. ...

Q631 Chair: ... during the hostilities in Gaza in 2014, your Government decided to review licences for arms exports to Israel. You committed not to grant any further licences until hostilities were ceased. I think there were 12 specific licences that you were concerned about at the time. Why has there been no review, cessation, pause, despite the fact that there should have been an automatic trigger that exists within the Department to immediately suspend when there is a significant change on the ground?

Lord Cameron: The way this works is, as I am sure you know, that the grant of licences is done by the Department of Trade on the advice of the Foreign Office, and the Foreign Office has to look at compliance with international humanitarian law, based on an assessment of the commitment that Israel has, the capability—and whether they can they actually deliver on that capability—and the compliance. That assessment is carried out on a rolling basis, so it is permanently reviewed. Where the circumstances change and we reach a different view, we would advise the Department of Trade accordingly.

Q632 Chair: But the immediate handbrake—for example, after the terrorist attack in Kosovo, an immediate handbrake was put in place on sales of arms to Serbia—there was no immediate handbrake on this situation that I am aware of ...

Lord Cameron: The circumstances are different, because of 7 October being such a hostile attack on Israel. The Government's position is that Israel has the right to defend itself and the right to try to stop Hamas launching future terrorist attacks, so it would be odd to have an automatic handbrake. ...

Q633 Chair: Israel has a full right to defend itself under international humanitarian law, but the British Government have a duty to ensure that its licences for arms exports are as accurate as they can be. ...

Q635 Chair: I just find it strange that when there were much lower levels of hostility and activity, you put in place one as Prime Minister, and this time round, despite the circumstances being so much more serious, there has not been a review. ...

Q636 Brendan O'Hara (SNP): ... have you received any guidance or advice, or received any submissions from the FCDO or Government lawyers, that Israel may be in breach of international humanitarian law? ...

Lord Cameron: What I have received is advice, as part of this process that I have just described to the Chair, and the advice then was passed on ... to the Department of Trade.

Q637 Brendan O'Hara: In terms of Israel's actions post 7 October—let me ask you personally—have you seen any evidence, been made aware of any evidence or have reasonable grounds to believe that Israel had breached international humanitarian law?

Lord Cameron: What I have to do is act on the advice that I am given. ...

Q638 Brendan O'Hara: ... What I am asking you, Foreign Secretary, is: have you been made aware, or seen any evidence, or have reasonable grounds to believe, that Israel has breached international humanitarian law? ...

Lord Cameron: I have seen lots of things that have been deeply concerning, and when I do, I ask advice. ...

Q639 Brendan O'Hara: And in your assessment as Foreign Secretary, has Israel, at any point in its response, breached international humanitarian law?

Lord Cameron: My job is not to make the legal adjudication, because I'm not a lawyer ...

Q640 Brendan O'Hara: ... Have your lawyers, in the FCDO or in Government, given you any advice as to whether Israel has breached international humanitarian law? ...

Lord Cameron: I know what you're asking and I don't want to—

Q641 Brendan O'Hara: Answer it.

Lord Cameron: ... I have described to you the process, because it is a process, so of course you see lots of things where you think, "Well, is that in line with international law?" So that is a process that the Foreign Office has to go through—to look at those instances, to put questions, as part of this process, to the Israeli authorities, to consider those answers and then to give me the considered advice ...

Q642 Brendan O'Hara: ... in answer or reply to the Chair, you said, and I quote, "One of the things we'd like the Israelis to do is switch the water back on." That says that they turned it off. It says that you recognise they have the power to turn it on. Therefore, isn't turning water off and having the ability to turn it back on, but choosing not to—isn't that a breach of international humanitarian law?

Lord Cameron: Well, it's just something they ought to do, in my view.

Q643 Brendan O'Hara: Of course they should do it; every human being would say you don't cut people's water supply off. But I'm asking you, in your position as Foreign Secretary, around the point of international humanitarian law: if Israel have the power to turn back on the water that they turned off, surely that is a flagrant breach of international humanitarian law.

Lord Cameron: Well, I'm not a lawyer. My view is they ought to switch it on because the north of Gaza—the conflict is now effectively over there, and so getting more water and power into northern Gaza would be a very good thing to do. ...

Q644 Chair: ... Sir Philip, under international obligations, do occupying powers have an obligation to provide access to water—yes or no?

Sir Philip Barton: You're asking me a technical, legal question—

Q645 Chair: ... We all know that under international law there is an obligation for occupying powers to provide water.

Sir Philip Barton: You're asking me a technical question about occupying powers and what their obligations are in international law. I imagine you're correct, Chair, but I'm also not a lawyer. ...

Q646 Chair: ... You know that it is not that you presume I'm correct; that "is" the duty on an occupying power. ...

Q647 Sir Philip Barton: I think that is right, so yes, but I would also add that in answering your questions earlier about occupying, occupation—

Q648 Chair: I am not asking you to apply it to Israel. The facts are, though, that they are required to. Lord Cameron, just to clarify, you have received no advice at any point from any Government lawyer that states that Israel is in breach of international humanitarian law.

Lord Cameron: That's not what I said.

Q649 Chair: That's why I'm asking you to clarify. ...

Q650 Lord Cameron: Yes, well, the legal advice I have received is consistent with the fact that we have not changed our export procedures—

Q651 Chair: But it's not about arms exports; it's about international humanitarian law being upheld when it comes to aid, when it comes to the way in which airstrikes are being prosecuted, and everything else. ... In any realm, in any respect, you have never had a piece of paper put in front of you by a Foreign Office lawyer that says that Israel is in breach of its international humanitarian commitments under international humanitarian law.

Lord Cameron: Look, the reason for not answering this question is that I cannot recall every single bit of paper that has been put in front of me. ...

Q652 Chair: Forgive me, but in 2013 you were quite happy to say from the Dispatch Box that war crimes had been committed by the Assad regime when it came to chemical

weapons use, and two years later you were happy to say that Hamas had committed a war crime when they shot rockets into Israel.

Lord Cameron: Well, I do think there is a difference between using chemical weapons to kill people and Israel fighting a conflict where they are trying to deal with a terrorist force that inflicted an appalling attack on their country.

Q653 Chair: It is a difference in setting or specifics or scale, but not in principle ...

Lord Cameron: If you are asking me whether I am worried that Israel has taken action that might be in breach of international law, because particular premises have been bombed, yes, of course I am worried about that. That is why I consult the Foreign Office lawyers when giving this advice on arms exports. ...

Q654 Brendan O'Hara: I understand the question that you want to answer, but the question that I want to ask is: have you received legal advice that says that Israel is in breach of international humanitarian law?

Lord Cameron: The short answer to that is no, but I might want to qualify it instantly because it is not fair on the lawyers. Of course, the lawyers give me lots of advice saying, "We're worried about this event, that event, this event, that event. We're going to go away and consult the Israeli authorities. We're going to ask a bunch of questions and then we're going to give you considered legal advice: given everything, on the basis of capability, commitment and everything else, have they broken international law?" ... Does that help at all?

Q655 Brendan O'Hara: No, but unfortunately I think that's as good as we're going to get from you.

Finally, Foreign Secretary, what assessment have you made of the Israeli ambassador's claim that "every school...mosque" and "every second house" in Gaza "has access to tunnels" and "ammunition"? ... When pressed on whether that means the complete destruction of Gaza by Israel, she replied, "do you have another solution"? In your opinion, was she freelancing when she was speaking to that television interviewer or was she speaking for the Israeli Government?

Lord Cameron: I don't agree with that approach. ...

Q656 Brendan O'Hara: I am not asking you about the approach. I am asking whether you think she was speaking for the Israeli Government or was she freelancing?

Lord Cameron: I don't know. I would hope that that is not the position of the Israeli Government, because it is the wrong position. ...

Q657 Lord Cameron: ... By the way, none of the individuals released so far live in the UK. No British hostages have been released, as I said. I just did not want to give a wrong answer.

Bob Seely: ... I am not asking you to be a faux lawyer. I am also very aware that in Hamas you have an organisation that does not pretend to do anything by any moral justification that we recognise. It slaughters people and rapes people; its approach to sexual violence is despicable, etc. I also understand that Israel, probably rightly, feels that the world is always very quick to judge its actions and never bothers to judge the actions of those—Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis—who are trying to attack it.

Having said that, reading between the lines, what you seem to be saying is not that you have had lawyers say that they are breaching international law. It is very difficult to argue that, because you have to understand the Israelis' legal approach to what they are doing and how they judge proportionality. I am assuming, reading between the lines, that your lawyers are saying that potentially the Israelis are vulnerable to a challenge from The Hague court and elsewhere, and that in some of the things they are doing, potentially in relation to proportionality, there is a vulnerability. Is that a better way of asking?

Lord Cameron: ... The advice has been, so far, that they have the commitment, the capability and the compliance, but on lots of occasions that is under question. ...

Q659 Dan Carden: Foreign Secretary, 10 years ago you were very outspoken on Gaza being what you called an “open-air prison”. I just want to put some of the statistics that I have on the record: 1.9 million people have been displaced, 70% of Gaza’s residential buildings have been destroyed, most schools have been destroyed and most hospitals have been rendered inoperable. This week, the International Criminal Court will hold public hearings on South Africa’s application under obligations relating to the genocide convention. Could you give the Government’s views on that?

Lord Cameron: First of all, on the South Africa case—I think it is to the International Court of Justice rather than the International Criminal Court—I do not think that is helpful. I do not agree with it. I do not think it is right. I do not think we should bandy around terms like genocide in this case; I do not think that is correct. That does not change our long-standing position that, ultimately, it is for the courts to define genocide, not for states. ... In terms of what I said about Gaza, it has been unsatisfactory for years—the fact that there has not been better access to and from Gaza, and the situation in Gaza ...

Q660 Dan Carden: It is not for courts to determine, is it? It is for states who are party to the convention.

Lord Cameron: Ultimately, the long-standing position of the British Government on all questions of genocide ... is that it is not for a Government to say, “That is genocide.” It is for a court—the ICJ or the ICC—to determine genocide.

Q661 Dan Carden: So it is not for the UK Government to consider the risk of genocide in any case.

Lord Cameron: Of course, if we want to, as we have on other occasions, put information into a court when they are considering a question, we are at liberty to do that ... But you are asking me specifically about the South African case. Our view is that Israel does have a right to defend itself, must act within international humanitarian law, should avoid civilian casualties, and should do better on that ground, but we do not believe that calling this genocide and claiming that this is genocide is the right approach, and we do not agree with what South Africa is doing.

Q662 Ranil Jayawardena (Conservative): ... can I pivot to the issue of the West Bank? What is your view of the increase in violence there, and have you had conversations with the Israeli Government to try and reduce it?

Lord Cameron: Yes, I agree with you. I think that what is happening in terms of settler violence is unacceptable. I have raised this, I think, in every conversation I have had with Israeli interlocutors. We have gone one further than that and, working with the Home Office, put in place travel bans on those people responsible for settler violence. We have the opportunity, should we judge it right, to move that from a travel ban up to a full sanction, which obviously includes the travel ban, the asset freeze and other things. ... It is not right what is happening. As well as being terrible for the Palestinian people that live there, this is, long term, very bad for Israel, because Israel needs, fundamentally, a two-state solution in order for it to have the security it needs. So it needs to make the West Bank a functioning political space.

Q663 Ranil Jayawardena: So why are we only seeing escalations in the violence, given that you are making representations and others are making representations? ...

Lord Cameron: I think it is a range of things. Because of what happened on 7 October and what has happened subsequently, you have a rise in tensions across the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in the West Bank. You have the extreme settler movement, who have been perpetrating these acts. You have some politicians in Israel who do not call them out—indeed, they even support them—and that is why it is very important that proper friends of Israel, including Britain, call this out and are very clear about it.

Q664 Ranil Jayawardena: Given that you have announced that you have banned settlers from entering the UK, what would be the trigger to up that to a full sanction? ...

Lord Cameron: ... I think there is a sense that if this continues—if it gets worse, if more acts are carried out—we would consider taking the travel ban up to a full sanction.

Q665 Ranil Jayawardena: You say “more acts” being carried out. They are being carried out—this is happening all the time. ...

Lord Cameron: If you are asking for a sort of matrix for the decision, I do not have one ... But there is no hesitation: our view is that this is not right, and we need to act. ...

Q666 Chair: ... Israel has said that it is looking to the EU and US to reconstruct and pay for the reconstruction of Gaza. Can I ask if you agree with that?

Lord Cameron: I think it is going to take a giant international effort, because the level of the destruction is so great. We are going to have to try to bring together a whole group of countries ... including the Arab and Muslim states. ...

Q667 Chair: Should it not be for Israel, though, to lead on the reconstruction? To go to Ranil’s point, it was able to find \$70 million to fund the expansion of illegal settlements over the next year, despite lobbying by this Government to stop that. Surely Israel should be leading on the reconstruction of Gaza.

Lord Cameron: I think it will take more than any one country to do this.

Q668 Chair: ... I have been urging the creation of a Palestine contact group. One of those aspects would be, for me, that the priority is track-two diplomacy. We need to get civil society—women, youth and other groups—in the room who are ready to talk about the long-term peace or the “day after” ... Are we even anywhere close to bringing together track-two diplomacy? ...

Lord Cameron: ... some countries have been less inclined to talk about it until the conflict is over, but I think you have seen in recent days an Egyptian plan—you have even seen the Israelis talk about what should happen in Gaza after this conflict is over. I think the space is opening up; the conversations are taking place now.

Q669 Royston Smith (Conservative): ... what is your sense of what is happening in the south of the Red sea, and what are the Government and you, the Foreign Secretary, doing to prevent contagion in the region?

Lord Cameron: I think what is happening in the Red sea is extremely dangerous, in that you have had repeated Houthi attacks upon not just Israeli shipping, as they would claim, but all shipping. You have to in some ways try to separate this from the conflict for a second and think, “Is it acceptable that one of the most important sea lanes in the world has effectively been closed by a group that are unacceptably, illegally and continually attacking shipping?” My answer is no, it is not. ... Of course, no one wants to see escalation of conflict in the Middle East, but it is unacceptable to have the freedom of navigation affected in this way. ...

Q670 Royston Smith: What is your sense of why the Houthis are involving themselves? They would say that it is the Palestinian cause and they feel that they should do what they can to take the side of the Palestinians against what they see as the aggressor: the Israelis.

Lord Cameron: That is exactly what they say. They are also, in some ways, a proxy for Iranian action. ...

Q671 Royston Smith: ... Why now? Why would they want to embroil themselves in this?

Lord Cameron: ... I think partly it is a sort of competition for attention, for voice, for making them more popular in the world they want to be in by taking action because of what is happening in Gaza. But they need to be told, as they have been told, that this is not a free option and that consequences follow. ...

Q672 Royston Smith: Can we talk about the road map for peace proposed by the Saudi Government? I believe they are in discussions with the Houthis now. ... Do you see the same as we have been told by others—that this is turning into a Houthi-Saudi deal, as opposed to a Yemen solution, which may be, in the way that Gaza and Israel may be, a

two-state solution?

Lord Cameron: What I see—and I praise the Saudis for doing this—is a genuine attempt at a peace process to bring this long-standing conflict to an end. These processes work only if you include all the relevant participants in them. ...

Q674 Royston Smith: ... On the Abraham accords and Saudi normalisation with Israel, do you think that those agreements and arrangements are now in jeopardy because of what is happening in Israel and Gaza?

Lord Cameron: My instinct is that, if you go to the Emirates, Bahrain or Morocco, they are very committed to what they agreed to. They see it as a good advance. It is obviously under some pressure because of local opinion, but I think they are committed to it. I think that, in the medium term, the Saudis would still like to get that back on track. I think there is a genuine view that part of peace for this region is recognition of Israel by these major powers, but you can't leave the Palestinians out of this equation. You have to have the Palestinians feeling that they can live in dignity and security in the Palestinian territories with a state of their own.

Q675 Royston Smith: When we talk about the fact that it will have to be an international effort to rebuild Gaza, do you think it is incumbent on the Middle Eastern Gulf countries and others to be the largest part of that solution?

Lord Cameron: They obviously have huge capabilities and capacity to do that, but I think it is going to be quite a diplomatic effort to get everybody around the table and to get everybody to contribute ...

Q676 Bob Seely: ... to what extent do you see Iran as an opportunistic manipulator of events, and to what extent do you see it as the prime mover behind what is happening, not only against Israel but against Saudi, using the various proxies that it has, be they the proxies in Iraq, Hezbollah, Hamas or the Houthis?

Lord Cameron: ... it is clear that all of these organisations—whether it is Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis or Iran-backed armed groups in Syria and Iraq—have the support of Iran in common, but they have quite a lot of agency to act on their own. ...

Q677 Bob Seely: And that is the FCDO's view—that they have agency and they are supported.

Lord Cameron: My view very strongly is that Iran is a malign influence in the region. ... There is no doubt that it gives weapons, training, ability, money and support to all these groups. ... We know that Houthi weapons come from Iran. We know that Hezbollah rockets come from Iran. ... But the way you put the question was, do we think that these groups are backed by Iran and manipulated by Iran but, ultimately, able to make some of their own decisions? If that is the way you put it, I would say it is that—yes.

Q678 Dan Carden: This Committee warned against the deprioritising of the Middle East. I wonder whether, on reflection, you regret that there was not a single mention of Palestine or the Middle East peace process in the last integrated review and refresh, and whether you can explain that.

Lord Cameron: The integrated review—and the refresh, actually—was before my time, but I will own up to another sin, if you like. If you go back to 2008, '09, '10 onwards, there were some real efforts to get the peace process under way ... but ultimately they kept getting stalled, and Israeli politics kept going in a direction that made it very hard to make progress. I remember something that Obama said to me. I was pushing him and saying, "Come on, Barack; we've got to do more, we've got to do more," and he was saying, "Look, David, we can't want this more than they want it"—more than the Palestinians and the Israelis want it. That is true, but none the less, looking back, it is one of those things where you just wish even more had been done.

Q679 Lord Cameron: ... it has always been the British Government's view ... that the two-state solution is the answer to the Israel-Palestine conundrum. ...

What I was trying to say is that I think there have been moments of great effort and action, and moments when Israeli politics is going the wrong way, the global financial crisis takes over, there are other problems—Iranian mischief rises—and it is harder to get this moving. ... Israeli politics has just moved in a completely different direction, where it was hard to find anyone who supported a two-state solution. Hopefully, out of this crisis, we can try to start again to make the long-term argument that the only way you will get true peace and security is the two-state solution, but it will be a hard ask.

Chair: ... In June last year, I gave a speech in which I said we were going to see the Gaza crisis of 2023. That was not because I have a crystal ball but because I listen to our Arab partners. ... it is vital that we do not allow this time to be the time that we fail; we must move forward. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14047/html/>

UNSC Resolution 2720, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

UK Parliament Early Day Motions

Jon Trickett (Labour) [255] Government legal advice on Gaza – That this House understands that questions have been raised internationally about the legality of the Israeli government's actions in Gaza; recognises that in November 2023 UN experts raised the alarm about the risk of genocide in Gaza; highlights the UN General Secretary's reasons for invoking Article 99 that there is a high risk of total collapse of the humanitarian support system in Gaza, which would have devastating consequences; further highlights his comments to the Security Council that international humanitarian law includes the duty to protect civilians and to comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution and that the laws of war also demand that civilians' essential needs must be met, including by facilitating the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian relief; notes the Spanish Prime Minister's comments that he has serious doubts that Israel is complying with international humanitarian law; further notes the letter signed by prominent Israeli public figures to the Attorney General in December 2023 which said there have been explicit calls to commit atrocious crimes against millions of civilians, providing evidence of the discourse of annihilation, expulsion and revenge; acknowledges the case South Africa has brought to the International Court of Justice claiming Israel's treatment of Palestinians is tantamount to genocidal actions; and calls on the Government to publish in full the legal advice it has received from its law officers regarding the situation in Gaza, particularly in the run up to UN votes, and the legality of the UK export licensing of arms to the Israel.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61736>

John McDonnell (Labour) [254] Short-term medical evacuation of children from Gaza – That this House welcomes the work of Saving Gaza's Children, an NGO dedicated to supporting the children of Gaza to receive life-saving and time-critical, emergency medical care required as a result of the Israel-Gaza conflict by identifying children in dire need of medical evacuation and securing their evacuation to host states which are currently better equipped to manage their complex and often life-threatening medical needs, liaising directly with Gazan medical teams and the Palestinian Ministry of Health, and working closely with the child's legal guardian to monitor his or her diagnosis, progress, and prognosis whilst remaining sensitive to the fact that Palestinians feel strongly that their children should return to Palestine and paying special attention to ensuring that children are evacuated through documented safe passages and that all necessary protocols are followed to ensure a child's safe return with a focus on supporting injured children back

into Palestinian society ensuring that they receive all the support they need to live as normal a life as possible; and urges the Government urgently to liaise with the Egyptian and Palestinian Health Ministries to assist NGOs such as Saving Gaza's Children to create a short-term medical evacuation programme from Gaza to the UK much like the scheme that worked effectively to support Ukrainian children.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61735>

House of Commons Library Briefings

Jewish communities and the potential merits of a British Jewish History Month

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2023-0237/CDP-2023-0237.pdf>

Increases in antisemitic offences

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2023-0238/CDP-2023-0238.pdf>

House of Lords Library Deposited Paper

Letter from the Earl of Minto to Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton regarding whether any of the 74 tonnes of humanitarian aid the UK delivered to Egypt has reached Gaza

... As you will have heard from our Secretary of State for Defence, four RAF flights carrying a total of 74 tonnes of humanitarian aid landed in Egypt on 25 October, 2 November, 3 November and 23 November. The UK has supplied lifesaving items such as wound care packs, water filters and solar powered lights. The aid delivered also included vital enabling equipment for the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, such as forklift trucks, belt conveyors and lighting towers, to manage and deliver aid more effectively. The most recent of the flights carried 23 tonnes of humanitarian aid, including 4,500 blankets and 4,500 sleeping mats for distribution by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

We continue to call for immediate, safe and unimpeded, humanitarian access for lifesaving aid to reach civilians. However, limited supplies are currently being allowed through the crossing at Rafah following inspection by the Israeli authorities.

We can confirm that the 74 tonnes of aid have been handed over to the consignee, the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, for onward distribution by UNRWA and other partners. The Qatar negotiated pause in combat operations lasted for seven days (to 30 Nov) and saw approximately 200 trucks of aid entering Gaza each day. In the period between 1 Dec and 8 Dec an estimated 650 trucks carrying aid entered Gaza. At present, the data regarding what aid is reaching the affected civilian population is very limited.

The UK has uplifted the humanitarian funding to the Occupied Palestinian Territories for Palestinian civilians by £60m. The first tranche of £30m has been programmed and allocations for the remaining £30m are being finalised. By utilising trusted partners, the UK has enhanced safeguards against aid diversion (for example, vetting, mapping, and oversight of downstream partners).

We will continue to support the FCDO-led effort to pursue viable routes to deliver urgently needed humanitarian aid and to use our engagements in the region to urge Israel to open other border crossings to enable more aid to reach civilians in need.

<https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2024-0019/Lancaster.pdf>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We call on all parties to implement resolution 2720 on Gaza in full: UK statement at the UN General Assembly

Colleagues, we have heard the repeated warnings from humanitarian experts on the ground in Gaza that nine out of ten people are only getting one meal a day. That over half a million people are projected to be facing catastrophic levels of hunger. And that disease is spreading in overcrowded areas as people go without basic healthcare, shelter and clean water. So it is devastating to hear that aid is still piling up outside Gaza, undelivered to those in desperate need.

The UK reiterates our strong support for Security Council resolution 2720, for which we voted in favour, and reiterates our thanks to the UAE for their leadership. The resolution set out the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access, the release of hostages and steps towards a sustainable ceasefire where Hamas can no longer pose a threat to Israel.

The UK, as a P5 member, considers the veto a heavy responsibility, to be used in the interests of securing the peace and security that people around the world seek. It should be exercised responsibly, and with caution.

United Nations Security Council resolution 2720 is definitive. It demands that the parties to the conflict “allow, facilitate and enable the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance” throughout the Gaza strip. We call on all parties to implement this resolution in full.

We want to see at least 500 aid and private sector trucks enter Gaza every day, far more than the 150 currently taking place. Israel should accelerate and rationalise its screening, clear the backlog of loaded trucks in Egypt, and do everything else it can to facilitate aid into Gaza. Israel should also open more entry points for longer, for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, if security allows.

The UK warmly welcomes the appointment of Sigrid Kaag as the UN’s Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator. She brings a vast wealth of experience to this crisis. All parties to the conflict should cooperate fully with her and her team. The UK is also clear that Israel should renew visas for UN and NGO staff.

The Foreign Secretary has consistently raised these issues with his Israeli counterparts, including Foreign Minister Israel Katz and Minister for Strategic Affairs, Ron Dermer. The Foreign Secretary has also appointed Mark Bryson-Richardson in December as his Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to coordinate our efforts to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-call-on-all-parties-to-implement-resolution-2720-on-gaza-in-full-uk-statement-at-the-un-general-assembly>

UNSC Resolution 2720, referred to above, can be read at
[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

UNSC Resolution 2334, referred to above, can be read at
[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2334\(2016\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2334(2016))

Scottish Parliament Written Answers

Police Scotland: Israel

Mercedes Villalba (Labour) [S6W-23932] To ask the Scottish Government whether Police Scotland has provided any training, advice, guidance or support to the (a) Israel Police, (b) Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and (c) Israeli security services; if so, what type of support has been provided, and what the financial value was of any contract.

Angela Constance: The Chief Constable of Police Scotland, with oversight from

the Scottish Police Authority, considers any requests to provide training to other police forces or organisations via their International Development and Innovation Unit.

Police Scotland have confirmed that no training, advice, guidance or support has been provided to the Israel Police, the Israel Defence Forces, or the Israeli Security Services.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-23932>

Procurement: Israel

Mercedes Villalba (Labour) [S6W-23933] To ask the Scottish Government whether any of its departments or agencies have established contractual links with any (a) department or agency of the Israeli government, (b) public body based in Israel, (c) non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Israel and (d) private company that provides goods and services to the Israeli government.

Tom Arthur: An analysis of data from the Scottish Procurement Information Hub and Public Contracts Scotland, covering financial year 2017/18 to date, has not identified any spend or contracts with contractors in categories (a) to (c). We do not routinely capture information about which other clients contractors engage with, so do not hold information in relation to (d).

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-23933>

Scottish Government FoI Release

Breakdown of humanitarian aid for Gaza

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202300383828/>

United Nations

Unhindered Humanitarian Aid, Saving Civilian Lives Must Be Priority in Gaza, Speakers Stress as General Assembly Examines United States Use of Veto in Security Council

Speakers in the General Assembly ... examined the recent use of veto by the United States against an amendment to Security Council resolution 2720 (2023) on Gaza that would have called for “an urgent suspension of hostilities to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access” and for “urgent steps towards a sustainable cessation of hostilities”. The meeting was held under the Assembly’s standing mandate to convene within 10 working days of a veto being cast in the Council. On 22 December, the United States vetoed an amendment proposed by the Russian Federation. ...

At the start of today’ meeting, Assembly Vice President Cheikh Niang (Senegal) said the adoption of resolution 2720 (2023) was a welcome step. He urged all parties to fully implement it and all other relevant texts ... “Our immediate priority must be to protect civilians and save lives,” he stressed ...

Explaining its use of veto, the representative of the United States stressed that his delegation worked closely with many others in good faith to craft a strong, humanitarian-focused resolution to get more humanitarian aid into — and hostages out of — Gaza. However, one Council member continued to advance amendments and ideas disconnected from the situation on the ground. It is troubling that so many Member States have stopped talking about the plight of the more than 100 hostages still held by Hamas and other groups.

Further, it is striking that, while many countries urge an end to the conflict, there are few demands for Hamas to stop hiding behind civilians, lay down their arms and surrender, he said, emphasizing: “This would have been over if Hamas’ leaders had done that.” ...

Calling the watered-down resolution a “license” for Israel to continue killing Palestinian civilians in Gaza, [the Russian Federation’s delegate] stressed the need for the Council to clearly demand a full-fledged ceasefire. Without it, implementing the Council’s decisions in Gaza is simply impossible, she added.

The Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine said that the Council is being prevented from calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, which is indispensable to achieve all humanitarian aims. “This schizophrenia needs to end,” he asserted, recalling that 153 Member States voted for a ceasefire in the Assembly resolution of 12 December 2023 (document A/ES-10/L.27) at its resumed Tenth Emergency Special Session. “This assault is without precedent in modern history in the scale and pace of killing of children, of UN personnel, of medical and rescue teams, of journalists,” he said, asking: “How can you reconcile opposing these atrocities and vetoing a call to end the war...?”

Underscoring that famine, the spread of infectious diseases and death in new forms and shapes is not an unforeseen consequence of a war but an Israeli war method — a man-made, occupation-made humanitarian catastrophe — he demanded: “Don’t call for peace and spread fire. If you want peace, start with a ceasefire.”

Presenting a counterargument, Israel’s delegate said that 96 days have passed since Hamas butchered and exterminated 1,300 Israelis and took 240 people hostage. However, the Assembly or any other United Nations body has yet to condemn such acts. Among the hostages was a nine-month-old boy, Kfir, who marked his first birthday in captivity. Instead of love from his family members, he is surrounded by terrorists. Demanding a ceasefire is tantamount to keeping Hamas in power as it would allow the group to reorganize and continue terror.

Calling the United Nations morally bankrupt, he urged it to hold Hamas accountable for its horrific acts and ensure the release of Kfir and other hostages. The UN is focusing only on the well-being of Gazans, who voted for Hamas, while ignoring Israeli victims. By remaining silent, the world body has become an accomplice to terrorists. Israel supports all humanitarian assistance, he said, rejecting a claim that his Government is obstructing aid. Hamas is looting critical supplies before they reach those in need. The war will end immediately if Hamas releases all hostages, he added. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12580.doc.htm>

UNSC Resolution 2720, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

Document A/ES-10/L.27, referred to above, can be read at

<https://undocs.org/en/A/ES-10/L.27>

Wars in Gaza, Ukraine Dominate Security Council’s 2023 Agenda, as Use of Veto Proliferates, Organ’s Ability to Act Hampered

... The year 2023 witnessed a three-decade high in the number of conflicts worldwide, even before simmering situations such as those in Sudan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory boiled over. ...

The Council convened a total of 269 public meetings in 2023 — marginally less than in 2022, when it met 276 times — with the highest number of those devoted once again to the war in Ukraine, which continued into its second year. Council members adopted 49 resolutions, compared to 54 in 2022, representing a 10-year-low. ...

The use of the veto proliferated in 2023, wielded twice by the United States on attempted

action to address Israel's war in Gaza, and once each by China and the Russian Federation in that same context. However, the Russian Federation was — for the second year in a row — the most prolific user of the measure, casting a veto three times in total. ... However, no conflagration brought the Council's discord to the fore as much as that in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, following the 7 October massacre of 1,200 people and seizure of 240 hostages by Palestinian militant group Hamas in Israel, and that country's subsequent retaliatory military operations. Yet, 2023 began with the Council's adoption, in February, of its first presidential statement on the Palestinian Question in eight years, through which members united to express concern over the announcement of expanded settlement activities by Israel's new far-right coalition Government. In August, Tor Wennesland, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process told the Council that 2023 was already the deadliest on record in the West Bank and Israel, with fatalities outstripping 2022's annual figures. The lack of a political horizon left a dangerous vacuum filled by extremists on both sides, he warned.

Those words proved true throughout the last months of 2023, following Hamas' attack and Israel's subsequent bombardment of Gaza. The Council met eight days into Israel's military campaign, holding what would be the first of many emergency meetings that did not call for a ceasefire due to a veto cast by the United States. Two days later, following a deadly attack on Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, the Council again failed to adopt a resolution calling for humanitarian pauses. On 25 October, the Council, yet again, was unable to adopt two texts addressing the war and consequent humanitarian crisis. On 30 October, Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), warned the Council that "an entire population is being dehumanized" in Gaza, while Israel's delegate, who sported a gold star on his chest, asserted that he would do so until the Council condemned the atrocities of Hamas — the "modern-day Nazis".

In the following days, as Israel's military offensive ground on, the death toll of civilians — including journalists, doctors, UN workers, women and children — soared, and those trapped in Gaza remained deprived of basic services. Meanwhile, the Council Chamber resounded with numerous calls for a ceasefire — from UN officials, Member States and international civil society groups — who warned of dangerous regional escalation. On 15 November, the Council finally adopted a resolution calling for a truce — which lasted a week — to allow for the safe release of hostages by Hamas and detainees by Israel. On the heels of Secretary-General Guterres's very first engagement of Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations, the Council met on 8 December, again failing to adopt a resolution for an immediate ceasefire due to the United States' veto. Acting a final time in 2023, members adopted a resolution on 22 December to appoint a humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for the Gaza Strip.

By this point, 20,000 Palestinians — almost half of them children — had been killed, while 85 per cent of the population — 2.3 million — had been forced from their homes into ever-smaller areas in the southern border as Egypt raised fears of mass expulsion. Meeting a final time on 29 December, as settler violence soared in the occupied West Bank, Khaled Khiari, Assistant-Secretary-General for the Middle East and Asia and the Pacific, emphasized that hostilities throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory should end with a plan to advance a two-State solution, with Gaza as an integral part of an independent Palestinian State living side by side with Israel. ...

Question of Palestine

Meetings: [5 January](#), [18 January](#), [20 February](#), [22 March](#), [25 April](#), [24 May](#), [27 June](#), [27 July](#), [21 August](#), [27 September](#), [16 October](#), [18 October](#), [18 October](#), [24 October](#), [25 October](#), [30 October](#), [31 October](#), [10 November](#), [15 November](#), [22 November](#), [29 November](#), [8 December](#), [8 December](#), [19 December](#), [21 December](#), [29 December](#).

Resolutions: [2712](#), [2720](#). Not adopted: [772](#), [795](#). Vetoed: [773](#), [792](#), [970](#).

Presidential Statements: [S/PRST/2023/1](#).

The year 2023 proved to be the deadliest for Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since the UN began recording fatalities in 2005. With a new coalition Government in Israel accelerating settlement activity, the Council proceeded with monthly meetings on the Palestinian Question that managed rather than solve the intractable conflict. However, the events of 7 October, when Hamas fighters invaded Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking 240 hostages, disrupted that paradigm. As Israel commenced retaliatory military operations, with catastrophic results to civilians and civilian infrastructure, the 15-nation organ proved slow to react publicly and when it met to act, its efforts were stymied by a lack of consensus, as borne out by multiple vetoes and non-adoptions.

Following Israel's new Minister for National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir's visit on 3 January to holy sites in Jerusalem within days of his appointment, on 5 January, the Council was briefed by Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, who said the visit was particularly inflammatory, given the Minister's past advocacy for changes to the status quo. The Palestinian Authority had condemned the visit, while Israel's Prime Minister, as well as senior Government officials, emphasized commitment to upholding the status quo, he noted. Still, he warned that any incident or tension at the holy sites could spill over and cause violence throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in Israel and elsewhere in the region.

Briefing the Council at a quarterly open debate on the Palestinian Question on 18 January, Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, said that the dangerous cycle of violence that continued to persist amid increased political tensions and a long-stalled peace process, was extracting a "devastating toll". ...

On 20 February the Council adopted a presidential statement — its first on the issue in more than eight years — expressing its deep concern and dismay with Israel's 12 February announcement of further expansion of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It also reiterated that continuing Israeli settlement activities were dangerously imperilling the viability of the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines. ...

Mr. Wennesland, returning to the Council on 22 March during the converging Ramadan, Easter and Passover holidays, called for the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem to be respected at a "holy and sensitive time" for the region's three major religions. ...

On 25 April, during a quarterly open debate, Mr. Wennesland reported on events that began on 4 and 5 April, when Israeli security forces entered the al-Qibli prayer hall of the Aqsa Mosque compound and forcibly removed Palestinians who were barricaded inside. Describing the incidents of violence that followed in the occupied West Bank, including the killing by Israeli security forces of 17 Palestinians, including 2 children, and the injuring of 4 women and 38 children, he expressed concern about the uptick in violence and inflammatory actions. He called for the status quo of holy sites to be respected and for security forces to exercise maximum restraint, adding: "I am appalled that children continue to be the victims of violence."

Mr. Wennesland briefed the 15-nation organ on 24 May, after another deadly surge in violence on 9 May following the death of a Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader from an 86-day hunger strike in an Israeli jail. In an exchange of air strikes and rocket launches, 10 Palestinian civilians were killed and more than 1,100 others were displaced. ...

On 27 June, Mr. Wennesland warned the Council that deepening occupation, settlement-expansion, high levels of violence against civilians and the absence of a political horizon were rapidly eroding hope among Palestinians and Israelis. Citing the recent approval of amendments by the Israeli Government to its settlement-planning procedures that could expedite advancement of settlement plans, he expressed alarm over the "extreme levels of settler violence", recalling that, as the occupying Power, Israel has an obligation to protect Palestinians and their property in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. ...

Mr. Khiari returned to the Council on 27 July, amid a deterioration in the situation in the occupied West Bank, following military operations by Israeli security forces in Jenin

refugee camp on 3 and 4 July, in which 12 Palestinians, including 4 children, were killed and more than 140 injured — the most in a single operation in the West Bank since the United Nations began tracking casualties in 2005. ...

On 21 August, Mr. Wennesland reported that Palestinians and Israelis were being killed and injured in incidents of near-daily violence, with the year's fatalities already surpassing 2022's annual figures. ...

Settlement-expansion took centre stage again on 27 September, with Mr. Wennesland reporting that such activities had been expedited, following plans advanced by Israeli authorities for 6,300 housing units in West Bank's Area C — administered by Israel — and 3,580 housing units in East Jerusalem, annexed by Israel in 1980. As a result, many Palestinians, including children, were leaving their communities, citing violence by settlers and shrinking grazing land. ...

On 7 October, fighters from Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups crossed over into southern Israel, launching "Operation al-Aqsa Deluge", killing 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals and returning to Gaza, taking 240 civilians and soldiers hostage. On the same day, Israel's Security Cabinet declared a state of war, launching "Operation Swords of Iron", targeting 5,000 locations across Gaza, which they said were Hamas sites. The Council met on 8 October in consultations, but it would take another eight days for them to hold the first public meeting. At that point, Israel had announced a complete siege of Gaza, blocking all entry of goods, including electricity, water, food and fuel. On 13 October, more than a million Gazans in the north of the Strip were told to leave their homes within 24 hours through paper notices that dropped from the sky.

Nine days into Israel's retaliatory bombardment of Gaza, the Council convened several times in a single week, to discuss the issue and attempt — unsuccessfully — to take action, including on 16 October, when it failed to adopt a draft resolution put forth by the Russian Federation, which would have called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. ... the United States' delegate stressed that it was the Council's responsibility to address the crisis, unequivocally condemn Hamas and support Israel's right to self-defence under the Charter of the United Nations. The United Kingdom's delegate added she could not support a document that failed to condemn Hamas' attacks. Israel's delegate urged the Council to support his country's right to defend itself for its self-preservation. Meanwhile, the Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, pointing to Gaza's collapsed humanitarian and health system, as well as the displacement of 1 million people, called on the Council to be guided by international law, with no exception or exceptionalism.

On 18 October, in the aftermath of an attack on Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip that killed hundreds of people, including civilians and health-care workers, the Council, due to a veto cast by the United States, failed to adopt a resolution put forth by Brazil's delegation that would have called for humanitarian pauses to allow full, safe and unhindered access for United Nations agencies. ...

Meeting a second time on 18 October, the Council heard from Mr. Wennesland, who expressed fear that the world was at the brink of a dangerous abyss that could change the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, if not the entire Middle East. ...

During a day-long ministerial debate on 24 October, Secretary-General Guterres called for an immediate ceasefire, for humanitarian aid without restrictions, for civilians and hospitals to be protected, and for the inviolability of UN facilities sheltering more than 600,000 Palestinians to be respected. "Even war has rules," he declared, adding that no party to an armed conflict was above international humanitarian law. ...

The following day, on 25 October, the Council met again to address the war and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, failing to adopt two competing draft resolutions. The first, from the United States, which would have condemned the terrorist attacks by Hamas on 7 October, called for the release of hostages, reaffirmed the rights of States to self-defence and called for humanitarian pauses, was defeated ... The second, by the Russian Federation, which would have called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, condemned

all violence and hostilities against civilians, condemned Hamas' 7 October attacks and the taking of civilian hostages, and urged the rescission of the order for civilians and UN staff to evacuate all northern Gaza and relocate to the south, was also defeated ...

On 30 October, the Council was briefed by Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, who described the Israel Defense Forces' bombardment of the Strip "shocking" and the unfolding human tragedy "unbearable". ...

As bombardments intensified in northern Gaza and Israeli ground forces reportedly encircled four hospitals, including Al-Shifa hospital, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) on 10 November told the Council that the situation in hospitals in Gaza was "impossible to describe", with corridors crammed with the injured, the sick and the dying, morgues overflowing and surgical procedures conducted without anaesthesia. Since 7 October, WHO verified more than 250 attacks on health-care facilities in Gaza and the West Bank, in addition to 25 attacks on similar sites in Israel. ...

On 15 November, the Council adopted resolution 2712 (2023) ... by which it called for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors through the Gaza Strip to facilitate the provision of essential goods and services. On the same day, the Israel Defense Forces stormed Al-Shifa hospital, in search of what it said were tunnels used by Hamas beneath the complex. It withdrew nine days later, stating that it had destroyed them.

Less than a week later, on 22 November, the Council heard from several senior UN officials who described the disastrous impact of the ongoing war in Gaza on women and children. ...

The Council held a ministerial-level meeting on 29 November that coincided with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Briefing the 15-nation organ, Secretary-General Guterres stated: "In a matter of weeks, a far greater number of children have been killed by Israeli military operations in Gaza than the total number of children killed during any year, by any party to a conflict, since I have been Secretary-General."

The Council met again on 8 December, following Secretary-General Guterres' engagement of Article 99 in Chapter XV of the Charter — the first time he used this measure since taking office in 2017 — to "bring to attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion, may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security". He informed the Council that the humanitarian support system in Gaza was at a high risk of total collapse. "We are at a breaking point [and] the situation is simply becoming untenable," he stressed. Citing information from the World Food Programme (WFP) that Gazans were at serious risk of starvation, he underscored that the international community must do everything it could to end their ordeal. He urged members of the Security Council to exert pressure to avert a humanitarian catastrophe" and reiterated his call for "an urgent humanitarian ceasefire".

Meeting again on 8 December, the Council — due to a veto cast by the United States, a permanent member — failed to adopt a text put forth by the United Arab Emirates, which would have demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access. ...

Meeting on 22 December, following several days' deliberations, deferrals and diplomatic engagements, the Council adopted resolution 2720 (2023) ... by which it requested the Secretary-General to appoint a Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for the Gaza Strip as it demanded the parties to the conflict to allow, facilitate and enable the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale to Palestinian civilians throughout that territory. ...

The Council reconvened on 29 December, with Mr. Khiari reporting that, since 7 October, tensions in the West Bank between Israeli security forces and Palestinians were escalating, resulting in 304 Palestinians fatalities, including 79 children, and 4 Israeli

fatalities. Israel was continuing its intense ground operations in Gaza, while Hamas was continuing to fire rockets from Gaza into Israel. Settler violence remained a grave concern as well. “Civilians from both sides — particularly the Gaza Strip — continue to bear the brunt of this conflict,” he said. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15558.doc.htm>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN experts demand accountability for victims of sexual torture and unlawful killings during 7 October attacks

UN experts have called for full accountability for the multitude of alleged crimes committed against civilians in Israel in the 7 October attacks, and cooperation with investigators.

The allegations include grave violations of international law, including killings, hostage-taking, and torture including sexual torture. Across 22 villages approximately 1,200 Israeli and foreign nationals were killed. Thousands more were injured. An estimated 240 adults, children and infants were taken hostage.

“As armed Palestinian groups rampaged through communities in Israel bordering the Gaza strip, thousands of people were subjected to targeted and brutal attacks, the vast majority of whom were civilians,” the experts said. “The growing body of evidence about reported sexual violence is particularly harrowing.”

The UN experts said individuals were allegedly burnt alive in their homes or bomb shelters. Some bodies were found decapitated or mutilated or both. Many bodies had signs of trauma consistent with executions. Many bodies had injuries consistent with beatings at or near the time of death.

Allegations of sexual torture include rapes and gang rapes, sexual assaults, mutilations and gunshots to genital areas. Female bodies were found with their clothing pulled up to their waists, with underpants removed or torn or stained with blood.

“These acts constitute gross violations of international law, amounting to war crimes which, given the number of victims and the extensive premeditation and planning of the attacks, may also qualify as crimes against humanity”, the experts said.

“There are no circumstances that justify their perpetration,” the experts said.

“Acknowledging and documenting the harm done, and the pursuit of justice are vital steps towards peace.”

“Each and every victim deserves to be recognized, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or sex, and our role is to be their voice,” they said.

The experts welcomed the release of 110 hostages while expressing deep concern for those still being held and called for their immediate and unconditional release.

“We are deeply conscious of the active conflict in Gaza and Israel and the severe humanitarian crisis. We urge all parties to agree a ceasefire, abide by international law, and investigate any crime alleged during the armed conflict,” the experts said.

The experts recall their previous [statement](#) on the need for independent and impartial investigations for all rights violations, including those in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.

They have already raised these issues through a letter addressed to the State of Palestine as the official UN Observer State and party to relevant human rights and humanitarian law treaties. A copy of the letter was also sent to the *de facto* authorities in Gaza [Hamas] which claimed responsibility for the overall attack and bears command responsibility as well as has human rights obligations in light of their exercise of government-like functions. A copy was also sent to the Government of Israel, which has territorial jurisdiction over the crimes.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/un-experts-demand-accountability-victims-sexual-torture-and-unlawful>

Israel and Lebanon – UN experts deplore extraterritorial use of lethal drones to conduct killings in countering terrorism

UN experts condemned Israel's alleged killings of Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Aroui and six others last week in Lebanon, which would amount to extrajudicial killings and crimes of murder.

The experts also deplored threats by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and senior Israeli officials to kill Hamas leaders anywhere in the world.

"All states are [prohibited](#) from arbitrarily depriving individuals of their right to life in military or security operations abroad, including when countering terrorism," said the experts.

"Killings in foreign territory are arbitrary when they are not authorised under international law. Israel was not exercising self-defence because it presented no evidence that the victims were committing an armed attack on Israel from Lebanese territory."

The experts noted that Israel has neither provided any legal justification for the strike nor reported it to the Security Council, as required by Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

"Any legitimate legal justification for Israel's military operations against Hamas in Gaza, in response to the 7 October attack on Israel emanating from Gaza, does not extend to authorising strikes in Lebanon or other countries. There is no legal basis for geographically unlimited attacks against members of an armed group wherever they are."

"Israel has a deplorable history of assassinating suspected terrorists abroad, such as the killing of a Hamas member in the United Arab Emirates in 2010, and hundreds of preventive strikes on Hezbollah in the Syrian civil war. Israeli police and courts must bring to justice all involved in these alleged murders."

The experts warned that the Israeli strike constituted a dangerous regional escalation of the Gaza conflict, a violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, and a prohibited use of military force against Lebanese territory contrary to Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter. The Security Council, General Assembly and Human Rights Council have repeatedly declared that states must respect international law in countering terrorism.

The United Nations has also affirmed that terrorism is a threat to human rights. The UN experts emphasised that Lebanon has a duty to prevent the use of its territory to prepare terrorist acts against Israeli civilians, and to investigate, arrest and prosecute or extradite suspects involved in terrorism in Lebanon or Israel, in accordance with human rights law. Other states, including Iran and Syria, have obligations not to support any terrorist preparations in Lebanon or Palestine directed against Israeli civilians.

The experts called on the Security Council to fulfill its responsibility to effectively respond to all states in the region whose actions threaten international peace and security.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/israel-and-lebanon-un-experts-deplore-extraterritorial-use-lethal-drones>

TOP

Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answers

Protection of Shipping Routes

Nigel Mills (Conservative) [900853] What steps [the Minister's] Department is taking to help protect shipping routes through the Red sea.

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat) [900857] What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Royal Navy in protecting merchant shipping routes in conflict zones.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Grant Shapps): ... The Royal Navy and the Government are committed to the protection of maritime trade, ensuring that both

people and shipping remain safe to travel through international waters. That work is driven by the latest intelligence and analysis of that picture. As I said on 19 December in my written statement, HMS Diamond has joined our partners and allies as part of Operation Prosperity Guardian to protect freedom of navigation and merchant shipping in the Red sea and the gulf of Aden.

Nigel Mills: ... Can [the Secretary of State] update the House on his discussions and work with our international partners to de-escalate the tensions, so that we do not need all the protection work and can go back to the normal free flow of trade?

Grant Shapps: As my hon. Friend will know, the Houthis have been causing havoc in that part of the Red sea, in particular attacking ships. There was a 500% increase in attacks on maritime shipping from November to December, showing that there is no direct connection to the wider conflict in the region but a decision by Houthis to attack free trade. That is unacceptable. We are working with our partners, through Operation Prosperity Guardian and other measures, to tackle it.

Alistair Carmichael: The Secretary of State is absolutely right to point the finger at the Houthis, but we should not ignore the role of Iran in this enterprise. What are he and the Government doing with our international partners to ensure that the merchant marine have the confidence to keep using the Red sea, which is critical to the smooth operating of world trade?

Grant Shapps: We call on the Iranian-backed Houthis to immediately cease these attacks. The Houthis will bear the responsibility and, I have to say, the consequences should they ignore those warnings. The right hon. Gentleman asks what more we have been doing; I issued a statement along with 10 other countries during the break, in which we made clear that consequences will follow if they do not stop this action. To be clear, the UK will not tolerate the Houthis closing international waterways. ...

John Healey (Labour): I welcome what the Defence Secretary has to say. These attacks on Red sea shipping must stop. They destabilise regional security, disrupt international trade and put civilian and military lives in danger. We back the UK action with allies in the new maritime protection force, and the joint statement condemning the Houthi attacks that the Secretary of State just mentioned. He announced today but has not mentioned to the House that HMS Richmond is sailing to the Gulf. In the light of these escalating tensions, what other Royal Navy ships has he put on stand-by for the region?

Grant Shapps: I did not mention that specifically because I have already made a written ministerial statement to the House. HMS Richmond is sailing to the region because both HMS Diamond and HMS Lancaster are already there, and eventually they will need to be swapped out. It is not escalation in terms. I want to repeat to the right hon. Gentleman, the House and the country that we will not tolerate trade being impacted globally in the manner in which the Houthis are impacting it. It will have ramifications on everybody's bills and on the flow of free trade and goods, and it must come to a halt. We have made clear through that joint statement that we are prepared to take action if required. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's commitment to support us in that action.

John Healey: When the UK took the important step of joining Operation Prosperity Guardian, the Secretary of State gave the House this update in a written statement. He has done the same today, alongside his comments at questions. If further action is required to deter Houthi attacks and to safeguard freedom of shipping in the Red sea, will he undertake to provide Parliament with an oral statement?

Grant Shapps: Yes. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-08/debates/CE26E616-4FDF-440C-9CC6-28F34924382F/ProtectionOfShippingRoutes>

The 19 December written statement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-19/debates/23121949000013/MaritimeUpdate>

The joint statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-condemning-houthi-attacks-against-commercial-shipping-in-the-red-sea-3-january-2024>

House of Commons Written Answers

Weapons: Human Rights

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [7724] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps he is taking to help ensure British-made weapons are not used in acts that breach human rights.

Leo Docherty: All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, which includes Criterion 2, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country of final destination as well as respect by that country for international humanitarian law. Extant licences are kept under careful review and the Business and Trade Secretary has the power to suspend, revoke or amend extant licences as required.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7724>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-12-08/hcws449>

International Red Cross: Finance

Neil Coyle (Labour) [7335] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the International Red Cross's processes in ensuring that funding is not distributed to projects that support proscribed organisations.

Andrew Mitchell: The FCDO has controls in place to ensure that UK aid goes direct to intended beneficiaries, and for its intended purposes. The FCDO carries out due diligence assessments of UK aid partners to ensure they have procedures in place to manage the risk of aid diversion, including the risk of support to proscribed terrorist groups. We assess that our aid partners, including the Red Cross Movement which plays a vital role in ensuring that people in need can be reached and protected in times of armed conflict, have adequate processes in place to ensure that aid reaches those that need it most.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-18/7335>

Armed Conflict: White Phosphorus

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [7718] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make it his policy to advocate for an international ban on the use of white phosphorus in conflicts.

Leo Docherty: It is not UK policy to advocate for an international ban on the use of white phosphorus. White phosphorus is an obscurant and may have legitimate military uses, for example in smoke grenades, decoy and countermeasure equipment and signalling flares. However, all parties to an armed conflict must ensure that their conduct and use of weapons complies with International Humanitarian Law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-19/7718>

UK Parliament Ministerial Statement

Red Sea

The Secretary of State for Defence (Grant Shapps) [HCWS167] On 19 December, I updated the House on the maritime security situation in the Red sea. The situation remains extremely serious, and I would like to provide a further update.

The United Kingdom and our international partners condemn the illegal and unjustified attacks on commercial vessels in the Red sea by Houthi militants. These attacks, which increased 500% from November to December, risk innocent lives, exacerbate the humanitarian suffering in Yemen, threaten regional security and harm the global economy. Our message is clear: we call for the Iranian-backed Houthi to immediately cease these illegal attacks.

The UK has joined the United States and other partners on Operation Prosperity Guardian to ensure the freedom of navigation in the Red sea and gulf of Aden. On Friday, Royal Navy frigate HMS Richmond set sail from Plymouth to provide resilience to the UK's presence in the gulf.

We are working with allies and partners to protect freedom of navigation and remain committed to holding malign actors accountable for unlawful seizures and attacks. The Houthis will bear the responsibility of the consequences should they continue to threaten lives and commercial shipping in these critical waterways.

As you would expect, while planning is under way for a range of scenarios, no decisions have been made and we continue to pursue all diplomatic routes.

Together with our allies and partners, we call for the immediate end of these illegal attacks and the release of unlawfully detained vessels and crews. The UK will not hesitate to take further action should the Houthis continue to ignore our warnings.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-08/debates/24010861000010/RedSea>

The 19 December update referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-19/debates/23121949000013/MaritimeUpdate>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3567>

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3539>

**** Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475>

House of Commons Library Briefing

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9822/CBP-9822.pdf>

Letter from the Welsh Minister for Finance and Local Government to the Senedd
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee

<https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s500010493/LJC6-01-24%20-%20Paper%2035%20-%20Letter%20from%20the%20Minister%20for%20Finance%20and%20Local%20Government%20%20January%202024.pdf>

The Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023 [Draft]

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2023/9780348253191/contents>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3535>

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3521>

Holocaust Memorial Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3421>

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3564>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3596>

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/terrorism-protection-of-premises-draft-bill-overarching-documents>

Scottish Parliament

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

TOP

Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes tomorrow**

Super-complaints: eligible entity criteria and procedural requirements [Online Safety Act] (closing date 11 January 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/super-complaints-eligible-entity-criteria-and-procedural-requirements>

**** closes in 2 days**

Death certification reform and the introduction of medical examiners [England] (closing date 12 January 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/death-certification-reform-and-the-introduction-of-medical-examiners>

**** closes in 2 days**

Changes to medical certification of cause of death and the role of medical examiners [Wales] (closing date 12 January 2024)

<https://www.gov.wales/death-certification-reform>

Strategic Equality Plan 2024 to 2028: proposed principles of approach and objectives
[Welsh Government] (closing date 12 February 2024)

<https://www.gov.wales/strategic-equality-plan-2024-2028-proposed-principles-approach-and-objectives>

TOP

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