



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answers

Topical Questions: Home Department

Jack Lopresti (Conservative): What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to provide advice to police forces across the country to help them support communities during the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas?

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend is right to ask that question, because sadly, we have seen an absolutely vile upsurge in antisemitism on our streets. We have seen people who claim to be speaking out for equality and justice actually defending people who take slaves, who violate women's and girls' rights, and who here in our own country make the Jewish community feel uncomfortable. That is exactly why this Government have committed £18 million to the Community Security Trust. Very sadly, we have also had to commit £7 million to academic security, because there has also been a massive increase in antisemitism in universities. We are combating all of that.

Julian Lewis (Conservative): How many times must a demonstration in the same cause be repeated, week in and week out, before the well-funded organisers become liable to pay for at least part of the policing costs?

James Cleverly: Of course, we recognise that there is legitimacy to public protests. We also recognise that the unprecedented and unwarranted pressure that this is putting on policing around the country is having an impact on communities. My view is that the organisers have made their point, and repeating it does not

strengthen their argument. Unfortunately, we are also seeing some deeply distasteful people weaving themselves in among those protesters, who are protesting on issues that they feel passionately about, but whose good will is being abused by others.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-15/debates/77163C1F-92BF-4419-9758-861F7C858FD2/TopicalQuestions#contribution-37D86613-2153-413D-A8CE-302EA9558F9C>

House of Commons Written Answers

Antisemitism

Jack Lopresti (Conservative) [900931] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department is taking to help support victims of antisemitism.

Tom Tugendhat: We're committed to tackling the scourge of antisemitism and are providing £18m for protective security funding for the Jewish community in 2023/24 – this figure will be maintained in 2024/25.

The Government is providing £7m to support schools and universities to tackle antisemitism, and funds both an online reporting portal to make it easier for victims to report crimes and a hub which supports local forces in tackling online hate crime.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-09/900931>

Hate Crime

Lee Anderson (Conservative) [8181] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what rehabilitative programmes are provided by the Probation Service to help tackle hate crime; and whether his Department has made a recent assessment of the impact of these programmes on levels of recidivism.

Edward Argar: There are no rehabilitative programmes or interventions designed specifically to address hate crime. Hate crime offences are typically driven by a range of underlying factors that are shared with other types of offending for which there are a range of programmes and interventions available that may be suitable. What programme(s) or intervention(s) may be most suitable for someone convicted of hate crime offences is determined based on the nature of the offence and an assessment to determine eligibility and the specific rehabilitative needs of the offender.

A number of studies and evaluations have been carried out in recent years on HMPPS rehabilitative programmes and interventions, and can be found by visiting

https://www.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-law#research_and_statistics

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8181>

Hate Crime: Police Cautions

Lee Anderson (Conservative) [8182] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether he plans to issue guidance to the police on requirements to refer to the Crown Prosecution Service when using the new diversionary caution for hate crime offences.

Gareth Bacon: As set out in the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act 2022, the Government legislated for a reformed two-tier cautions framework in England and Wales.

We have consulted on a draft Code of Practice to support future implementation. This covers the use, administration, and scrutiny of Diversionary and Community Cautions. The draft Code of Practice stipulates that a Diversionary or Community Caution may be given for a hate crime case but only once authorisation has been obtained from the Crown Prosecution Service. The draft Code of Practice was put to public consultation from 2 August to 13 October 2023 and invited views on the

operational impact of the draft Code, including the approach to excluded offences. Currently, we are analysing the consultation responses received to inform any necessary revisions to the draft Code of Practice and we will publish a Government response to the consultation in due course.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8182>

The draft Code of Practice referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/diversionary-and-community-cautions-draft-code-of-practice/diversionary-and-community-cautions-draft-code-of-practice>

House of Commons Library Briefing

Hate Crime Statistics

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8537/CBP-8537.pdf>

Home Office

Home Secretary declares Hizb ut-Tahrir as terrorists

The Home Secretary, James Cleverly, has ... laid a draft order before Parliament to proscribe the international Sunni Islamist political organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir under the Terrorism Act 2000.

If agreed by Parliament, the order will come into force on 19 January 2024. This means that belonging to, inviting support for and displaying articles in a public place in a way that arouses suspicion of membership or support for the group will be a criminal offence.

Certain proscription offences can be punishable by up to 14 years in prison, which can be handed down by a court alongside or in place of a fine. The resources of a proscribed organisation are terrorist property and may be seized. Once a group is proscribed its ability to operate openly in the UK will be significantly degraded because of the offences attached to membership and inviting support.

Founded in 1953, Hizb ut-Tahrir is an international political group with a long-term goal of establishing a Caliphate ruled under Islamic law. While their headquarters are in Lebanon, the group operates in at least 32 countries including the UK, United States, Canada and Australia.

The proscription of Hizb ut-Tahrir includes the global organisation, as well as all regional branches, including Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain.

Home Secretary, James Cleverly said: Hizb ut-Tahrir is an antisemitic organisation that actively promotes and encourages terrorism, including praising and celebrating the appalling 7 October attacks.

Proscribing this terrorist group will ensure that anyone who belongs to and invites supports for them will face consequences. It will curb Hizb ut-Tahrir's ability to operate as it currently does.

Hizb ut-Tahrir's praise of the 7 October attacks and associated incidents, as well as describing Hamas as 'heroes' on their central website constitutes promoting and encouraging terrorism.

Hizb ut-Tahrir has a history of praising and celebrating attacks against Israel and attacks against Jews more widely. The UK stands strongly against antisemitism and will not tolerate the promotion of terrorism in any form.

This group's antisemitic ideology and praise of attacks against innocent civilians in Israel outlines the necessity of its proscription.

Security Minister, Tom Tugendhat said: Hizb ut-Tahrir clearly encourage and promote terrorism.

Their celebration of Hamas' appalling attacks on Israel, going so far as to call the terrorists who raped and murdered Israeli citizens 'heroes', is disgraceful.

We stand firmly against antisemitism and hatred against the Jewish community in the UK. Several countries have banned Hizb ut-Tahrir for their various activities, including Germany, Egypt, Bangladesh, Pakistan and several Central Asian and Arab countries. Austria banned symbols of the group in May 2021.

The order will be debated in Parliament during this week and, if approved, Hizb ut-Tahrir will become the 80th organisation to be proscribed in the UK.

Other groups who have been proscribed by the British government include al-Qaeda, ISIS, National Action and most recently the Wagner Group.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-declares-hizb-ut-tahrir-as-terrorists>

The Electoral Commission

Overseas Voting

There are changes to voting for British and eligible Irish citizens living overseas from 16 January 2024. These include:

- People living overseas can now register to vote in the UK no matter how long ago they left or were last registered to vote in the UK.
- Overseas declarations are now valid for three years, lasting until 1 November in the third year after it takes effect (for example, if your declaration takes effect on 1 March 2024, it will expire on 1 November 2026).
- People living overseas can now register online (not available in Northern Ireland).

For information see

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/resources/democratic-engagement-resources/overseas-voting-resources-friends-and-family>

and

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-01/Overseas%20Voting%20Changes%20-%20FAQ%20-%20Overseas%20Voters.docx>

To register as an overseas voter see

<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

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See also Commons oral answers, and the Home Office press release “Home Secretary declares Hizb ut-Tahrir as terrorists” that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Defending the UK and Allies

col 577 The Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak): ... Since 19 November, Iran-backed Houthis have launched over 25 illegal and unacceptable attacks on commercial shipping in the Red sea, and on 9 January they mounted a direct attack against British and American warships. They fired on our ships and our sailors—it was the biggest attack on the Royal Navy for decades—and so we acted. We did so in self-defence, consistent with the UN charter, and to uphold freedom of navigation, as Britain has always done.

Alongside the United States, with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the

Netherlands, we ordered the RAF to strike two Houthi military facilities in Yemen. I want to be clear that these were limited strikes. They were carefully targeted at launch sites for drones and ballistic missiles to degrade the Houthis' capacity to make further attacks on international shipping. I can tell the House today that our initial assessment is that all 13 planned targets were destroyed. ...

I stress that this action was taken in self-defence. It was limited, not escalatory. It was a necessary and proportionate response to a direct threat to UK vessels, and therefore to the UK itself. ...

The Houthis' attacks on international shipping have put innocent lives at risk. They have held one crew hostage for almost two months, and they are causing growing economic disruption. Global commerce cannot operate under such conditions. ...

We have attempted to resolve this through diplomacy. After numerous international calls for the attacks to stop, a coalition of countries gave the Houthis a clear and unambiguous warning two weeks ago. ...

col 578 We should not fall for the Houthis' malign narrative that this is about Israel and Gaza—they target ships from around the world. We continue to work towards a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza and to get more aid to civilians. We also continue to support a negotiated settlement in Yemen's civil war, but I want to be very clear that this action is completely unrelated to those issues. ...

The Houthis' attacks risk worsening the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen itself. The UK helps to feed around 100,000 Yemenis every month, with aid arriving via the very sea routes that the Houthis have in their sights. ...

col 579 Keir Starmer (Labour): ... Labour backs this targeted action to reinforce maritime security in the Red sea. We strongly condemn the Houthi attacks, which are targeting commercial ships of all nationalities, putting civilians and military personnel—including British forces—in serious danger. ...

The international community clearly stands against the Houthi attacks. ...

Military action must of course always be underpinned by a clear strategy, and it is the role of this House to ask the right questions. So I ask the Prime Minister: what confidence does he have that his stated objectives have been met? What process will he follow in the face of continued Houthi attacks? What efforts are under way to maintain the support of the international community? Will he confirm that he stands by the parliamentary convention that, where possible, military interventions by the UK Government—particularly if they are part of a sustained campaign—should be brought before the House? Scrutiny is not the enemy of strategy.

col 580 While we back the action taken last week, these strikes still do bring risk, and we must avoid escalation across the middle east. Will the Prime Minister tell us how the UK will work with international partners so that our rightful actions are not used as an excuse by those who seek to expand violence throughout the wider region ...

Returning to the middle east, it is now over 100 days since the brutal events of 7 October. Israel's right to self-defence is fundamental, as is its duty to comply with international law. The longer the conflict in Gaza rages, the greater the risk of escalation throughout the entire region. On the Israel-Lebanon border, we must urge constraint. We must make it crystal clear to all parties that the UK does not support this conflict extending further in Lebanon.

Within Israel and Palestine, in the west bank, settler violence must stop immediately, and in Gaza we need a humanitarian truce now—not as a short pause, but as the first step on a road away from violence. The need for a sustainable ceasefire is clear to stop the killing of innocent civilians, to create the space for the return of all the hostages, and to provide urgent humanitarian relief to protect against disease and ward off a devastating famine. From that first step, we can begin a bigger push towards peace, a permanent end to the fighting and a lasting political solution. The hope of a two-state solution is fragile, but it is still there and we must fight for it, just as we must remain resolute in the face of aggression

that threatens global security, whether in Europe or in the Red sea.

The Prime Minister: ... we want a reduction of tensions in the region and a restoration of stability. ... It is incumbent on the Houthis not to escalate and not to continue what are illegal and unprovoked attacks on civilian shipping that put innocent lives at risk and damage the global economy ...

col 581 ... there will be malign forces out there that seek to distort our action and to turn it into something that it is not. It is important that we engage with our allies and others in the region, so that they understand what we did and why. I provide him with the assurance that we have done that and will continue to do that, because it is important that there is no linkage between these actions and anything else that is happening. ...

col 582 **Stephen Flynn (SNP):** ... While we would all agree, quite rightly, that we should not fall for the Houthis' narrative that this is directly related to the conflict in Israel and Gaza, we cannot escape the fact that a ceasefire in Gaza is essential for that wider regional stability. ...

Let me finally say that, although the Prime Minister has sought to defend his decision not to come to the House last week, it is clear that the House should have been recalled. It is what the public would have expected, and I urge him to do better in future.

col 583 **The Prime Minister:** ... Of course I am happy to answer questions about the situation in Israel and Gaza, but the House should make it very clear to the outside world that there is no link between what we have done last week and the situation there. This was a specific action in self-defence against the Houthis, who are conducting illegal strikes against innocent civilian shipping. That has nothing to do with what is going on in Israel and Gaza, and we must never let anyone think that this House believes that there is a link.

Ed Davey (Liberal Democrat): ... Liberal Democrats support limited strikes against the Houthis to open international shipping lanes, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that this region is a tinderbox. We have seen attacks on US soldiers in Syria and Iraq, the terrorism of Islamic State in Iran, the rockets of Hezbollah, and the Israeli strikes in Beirut—all stemming from the horrifying conflict in Israel and Gaza. ...

The Prime Minister: ... it is important that no one takes away the idea that this House believes, on any side, that there is a link between direct action in self-defence against the Houthis and the situation in Israel and Gaza. They are entirely distinct. We will do everything we can to bring more aid into Gaza, and to make sure that we work hard for a sustainable ceasefire. That is separate from our ability and necessary duty to defend our interests and our people.

col 584 **Liam Fox (Conservative):** ... is it not clear from Iran's support for Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis that it will do anything to stop a lasting peace between the Arab states and Israel because the Iranian regime believes that Israel should not exist at all? Would it not be a real defeat for Iran to see it isolated by a meaningful resolution of the Palestinian issue and the supercharging of the Abraham accords in a process to bring peace and stability to the region, all underpinned by an international resolve to confront Iran's proxies wherever they threaten our interests and values?

The Prime Minister: ... the behaviour of the Iranian regime poses a significant threat to the safety and security of the UK and our allies and ensures regional instability where we want to see more peace and stability. ...

col 586 **Apsana Begum (Labour):** According to the YouGov poll taken last month, 71% of the British public want a ceasefire in Israel-Gaza, yet last week the Government launched airstrikes in the Red sea in escalation of the situation in the middle east. ...

The Prime Minister: ... to conflate and link our action against the Houthis with the situation in Israel-Gaza just gives ammunition to our enemies who seek to make things worse in the region.

We acted in self-defence, and I have explained the reasons, the processes that we followed and the accountability that I have to Parliament, which I am now

discharging. Separately, we will, of course, work very hard to bring humanitarian aid into Gaza and to try to bring about the sustainable ceasefire that we all want to see.

col 587 Ian Blackford (SNP): ... the Prime Minister talks about a sustainable settlement in Gaza. It is important that we recognise the scale of the humanitarian suffering, so may I ask him for an update on what we are doing to ensure that in Gaza we deliver peace and security, with the hope of a better world as we come through 2024?

The Prime Minister: ... we are, of course, concerned about the devastating impact of the conflict in Gaza on the civilian population—too many people have lost their lives already—and there is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support into Gaza. I am pleased that the UK is playing a leading role: we have tripled our aid. Recently, the Foreign Secretary appointed a humanitarian envoy to the region to address some of the blockages, and we delivered our first maritime shipment of aid into Egypt—more than 80 tonnes of new aid. When I spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu, I impressed upon him the importance of not only increasing the flow of trucks, but, crucially, if we can, opening up extra crossings into Gaza, so that we can increase the flow of aid. We will continue to press on Israel to do that, so that we can bring more relief to people who are suffering a great deal.

col 588 Iain Duncan Smith (Conservative): ... we know that Iran has supported, has supplied and continues to direct the Houthi in their attacks; it supported and directed Hamas in their brutal attacks in October; and it has armed and directs Hezbollah on a regular basis and tells them what to do, through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. We understand all that, so why are we still reluctant to proscribe the IRGC, which is responsible for so much of the co-ordination of that work? ...

col 589 The Prime Minister: ... We have sanctioned more than 400 Iranian individuals and entities, including the IRGC in its entirety. ... we do not routinely comment on proscription, but I hope he will have seen the statement today about our proscription of Hizb ut-Tahrir ...

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): Some 17 million people in the region are living in hunger and food shortage, the people of Yemen have been bombarded by weapons supplied by Britain from Saudi Arabia for years, and we have a dreadful conflict going on in Gaza, where there are 30,000 people dead or missing. Where is the comprehensive plan by the western nations to try to bring about a comprehensive peace across the whole region, rather than pumping more and more weapons and money into more and more conflicts that will get worse? ...

The Prime Minister: ... As we and others take action to degrade and disrupt the capability of those who are malign actors in the region, that will give the space for positive voices to build the peace that we all want to see and to allow everyone to live side by side with dignity, security and opportunity. ...

col 590 Lyn Brown (Labour): ... May I ask what the Government's strategy is to prevent escalation? Also, last week the Government confirmed that there are currently no RAF aid flights or Royal Navy deliveries planned to take essential aid into Egypt and onwards to Gaza—why?

The Prime Minister: I am not entirely sure that the hon. Lady is right on that. We remain committed to increasing the amount of aid that we get into Gaza. We have tripled the financial amount and, as I have said, we recently saw our first maritime shipment of aid into Egypt by the UK military ship RFA Lyme Bay. The hon. Lady will be aware that there are considerable blockages and logistical challenges on the ground, which we are working to help to resolve. That is also why we are putting pressure on the Israelis—I spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu about this—to open up additional crossings such as Kerem Shalom. That will help us to increase the flow of aid into the region, and we absolutely want to see that happen.

Alex Davies-Jones (Labour): The Houthis are an antisemitic terrorist group that have

caused havoc in Yemen over the past decade, starting a civil war that has killed more than 350,000 people. Their slogan includes the lines, “Death to America, death to Israel, a curse upon the Jews”. Will the Prime Minister join me in condemning the shameful pro-Houthi chanting that we saw at many protests in the UK over the weekend?

col 591 The Prime Minister: ... I wholeheartedly agree with her. We will absolutely not tolerate that kind of language on our streets. We have been crystal clear about that. We have said to the police that they should take all decisive action against those who promote and encourage terrorism and, indeed, those who incite hatred and division on our streets. I hope the hon. Lady will have seen today’s proscription of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is another organisation that uses language similar to that she describes. Its promotion of terrorism is rooted in antisemitic ideology. I hope that gives her reassurance that we will confront this and stamp it out wherever we see it, because it is not in accordance with British values. Jewish people in this country deserve to be able to walk our streets in freedom and security.

Zarah Sultana (Labour): Past mistakes in the middle east should have taught this House that military intervention that starts out as limited can quickly escalate, risking a sequence of events far larger and more terrible, and even risk dragging us into war. ... Driving the region’s instability is Israel’s horrifying assault on Gaza, which has now lasted more than 100 days. Rather than giving Israel the green light to continue its brutal bombardment of Gaza, and risking a wider conflict, will the Prime Minister seek to de-escalate the situation and call for an immediate ceasefire?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps the hon. Lady would do well to call on Hamas and the Houthis to de-escalate the situation.

col 592 Andrew Percy (Conservative): Too many people give a free pass to the terrorists who perpetrated the worst murder of Jews. We have just seen an example of that, just as we saw examples of it on our streets this weekend, where people screamed, “Yemen, Yemen, turn another ship around”—completely unacceptable. One thing that links the Houthis, Hezbollah and Hamas is their genocidal intent towards Jews and their hatred of everything that we stand for in the western democracies, which is why it is incumbent on us to defend those values. I agree with everything that the Prime Minister has said, and urge him once more to ensure that our police take action against those on our streets who openly support terrorism.

The Prime Minister: I reassure my hon. Friend that the police have extensive powers to arrest those who incite violence or racial hatred. Of course, we keep all laws under review. We are working with the police on whether we need to strengthen those powers, but I have been absolutely clear that there must be zero tolerance for antisemitism and any forms of racism. We will not stand by when we see it happen, and the police should ensure that those who do that face the full force of the law.

Caroline Lucas (Green): The Foreign Secretary said yesterday that the purpose of the air strikes in Yemen was to send a message, but the message that we intend to send is not necessarily the message that gets received. The message seems to have been sent to many in the region that the UK is intervening in the war very clearly on the side of Israel. What plans do the Government have to manage and contain the escalation that is likely to ensue? Simply proclaiming that the activity was intended to be limited, not escalatory, does not make it so.

The Prime Minister: ... The hon. Lady could help, because this Parliament could speak with one voice so that the outside world and our allies in the region know that this has nothing to do with Israel and Gaza, and everything to do with our self-defence.

col 593 Tim Loughton (Conservative): ... we have seen at first hand how this brutal, misogynistic, homophobic and antisemitic terrorist regime, backed by Iran, presiding over the world’s greatest humanitarian crisis and responsible for throwing tens of thousands of

young men to their deaths on the frontline, have acted. Since 2022, they have benefited from a tentative ceasefire. Is this not a lesson in how sustainable ceasefires cannot be achieved with terrorist organisations unless and until they have been deprived of their arms and have succumbed to democratic legitimacy?

The Prime Minister: ... I say very simply that I agree with him and he makes an excellent point.

John McDonnell (Labour): I appreciate why the Prime Minister is trying not to link this to Gaza, but the reality is that the longer the Gaza war goes on, the greater the instability in the middle east. It is nearly 100 days since he gave his first statement after the terrible, horrendous actions by Hamas. He justified the actions this week with regard to the protection of marine rights. In those 100 days, 7,000 Palestinian children have been killed. What effective action is he taking to protect the right to life of Palestinian children and to prevent what is, in reality, the indiscriminate killing of Palestinian children by the Israel Defence Forces?

The Prime Minister: As I said, we are deeply concerned about the devastating impact of the fighting in Gaza on the civilian population. Too many people have lost their lives already, which is why we continue to call for international humanitarian law to be respected and for civilians to be protected. It is something that I continually raise with Prime Minister Netanyahu when I speak to him, and it is why we are doing absolutely everything we can to get more aid into Gaza to help those children and everyone else affected by what is happening.

col 594 **Brendan O'Hara (SNP):** Is [the Prime Minister] unable to see how ignoring Israel's egregious breaches of international law in Gaza, while purporting to act in defence of it in Yemen, actually undermines international law and the rules-based order?

The Prime Minister: No. Israel has the right to act in self-defence against Hamas, who conducted a terrorist attack on it, and we continue to call for international humanitarian law to be respected and for civilians to be protected in that conflict.

Robert Buckland (Conservative): The House should be in no doubt that conflating issues relating to Israel and Hamas is not a mature way to look at the problem ...

col 596 **Edward Leigh (Conservative):** ... Of course we have a right to defend ourselves, and of course sinister forces, such as the Houthis and Iran, are exploiting these tensions, but as we have influence on the Americans because we step up to the mark, can my right hon. Friend work with the American President to ensure that, just as he is completely vigorous in defending Israel and its right to exist, he is even as vigorous in defending the right of the Palestinian people to their own state, in peace and justice, without a settlement being imposed on them every week?

The Prime Minister: I say to my right hon. Friend that we want to see the long-term future of a two-state solution where Palestinian and Israeli people can live side by side in security and freedom, and with dignity and opportunity. That is the future that we are all striving for, and the events of the past few months have just reminded us that we need to double our efforts on making that happen.

Mick Whitley (Labour): I regard with the utmost seriousness the threat posed by Houthi forces to mariners in the Red sea, but does the Prime Minister accept that upholding the right to freedom of navigation in the region is an international challenge that should be dealt with through international diplomacy aimed principally at securing a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza, and that, by joining US-led military action without reference to the UN, we are in danger of exacerbating the threat posed to British citizens by terrorism?

The Prime Minister: Again, the hon. Gentleman has wrongly linked and conflated the situation in Israel and Gaza with the illegal attacks by the Houthis on innocent commercial shipping. That is simply wrong. ...

col 597 **Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour):** The death and destruction in Gaza is intolerable. Well over 20,000 children and innocent civilians have already been killed by Israeli forces, more than 100 Israeli hostages are still held by Hamas, and there is the real

risk of an escalating wider regional conflict. We desperately need an end to the violence, so can the Prime Minister explain exactly what diplomatic progress he has achieved towards securing a sustainable ceasefire and peace in Gaza?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for being, I think, the first Member on the Opposition Benches to remind the House that Hamas still holds 100 Israeli hostages—it is good that he pointed that out. He is right: we are continuing to do everything we can to bring about that sustainable ceasefire, including working with the Qataris and others to secure the release of hostages and put more aid into Gaza, because I want to see what the hon. Gentleman wants to see. No one wants to see this conflict go on for a moment longer; it must be a sustainable ceasefire, and that is what we will work hard to bring about.

col 598 Barry Sheerman (Labour Co-op): ... I was born on 17 August 1940, when the German bombs were falling all over and I was sheltering in a shelter. I have been a Labour friend of Israel ever since I went to the London School of Economics, but I do not trust Netanyahu's Government, although I do support the limited action that the Prime Minister has announced. As someone who was born in the blitz, I care very deeply about actions that might lead to an even greater conflagration in the middle east. That is the danger—it seems to me that it is exactly what Putin and Iran want. ...

The Prime Minister: ... the action we took was—I believe—necessary, but it was limited, proportionate, and in keeping with international law. ...

col 601 Rushanara Ali (Labour): Since the outbreak of war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas, as well as the crisis in shipping security, which has now led to the UK military response to protect British interests, fighting between Hezbollah and Israel has been intensifying, risking a wider escalation engulfing Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and other countries. Can the Prime Minister be more specific and tell the House exactly what he is doing, working with the US and regional partners, to bring an end to the war in Gaza and to stop a full-blown regional conflict ...

The Prime Minister: We are calling on Hamas and using our influence with their partners in the region to release hostages, and we are making sure we get as much aid into Gaza in the interim, because we know there is a need for it. We are concerned by the impact being caused, and the UK is playing a leading role in alleviating the suffering.

col 602 Jonathan Djanogly (Conservative): ... listening to the statement today, I am not hearing much of a connection with Gaza. What I am hearing again and again in questions is connections to Iran. It is easy to look at the symptoms, but the causes also need to be looked at. ...

The Prime Minister: ... the linkage is with the behaviour of the Iranian regime. ...

col 603 Chris Law (SNP): After the horrific events of 7 October, the Prime Minister told the House that the UK was working to prevent escalation. He said: “we are increasing our presence to prevent broader regional instability at this dangerous moment.”—[[Official Report, 16 October 2023; Vol. 738, c. 24.](#)]

Yet in the following months, nearly 24,000 Palestinians have been killed, and there has been cross-border fighting with Hezbollah, air raids in Lebanon and Syria, and now Houthi attacks on vessels in the Red sea, resulting in US and UK strikes in Yemen. Does he accept that the attempts to prevent escalation and broader instability are failing, that the cycle of violence must stop, and that that requires an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and an end to the indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza?

The Prime Minister: In Gaza, no one wants to see the conflict go on a moment longer than is necessary. We support a ceasefire, but it must be a sustainable ceasefire that will last. That is what we will continue to work to bring about.

col 604 Naz Shah (Labour): I associate myself with all the comments made by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on the commitment to root out antisemitism. It is unacceptable for British Jews to be held responsible for the actions of Israel as a

Government, as is the idea that they can have any effect on the Israeli Prime Minister or his Cabinet. In the same vein, given the rise of Islamophobia, it has been a new low and a painful blow today for the Prime Minister to say to a British Muslim in this House, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana), that she should tell Hamas and the Houthis to stop doing what they are doing. That is an Islamophobic trope. Maybe the Prime Minister will reflect, withdraw and take the opportunity to show leadership and apologise. ...

The Prime Minister: I have said to all Members consistently not to conflate these conflicts and, when calling on the UK to de-escalate tensions, to recognise that the people causing these situations in the first place are the Hamas terrorist organisation and the Houthis. It has nothing to do with anything other than recognising the instigators of this violence and illegality, and ensuring that that is uppermost in everybody's minds when we have these conversations about the best way to respond. ...

col 605 **Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op):** While the Prime Minister has clarified that the strikes in Yemen are disassociated from Gaza, the Iranian arc has drawn a different conclusion, not least as the strikes took place the same day as the International Court of Justice case brought by South Africa. We know that the only way forward is de-escalation. Given that assaults continue on the merchant navy, and assaults in Gaza continued over the weekend, when will the Prime Minister condemn Israel's attacks on civilians and call for an immediate ceasefire?

The Prime Minister: I have addressed that previously. With regard to South Africa's referral of Israel to the ICJ, that development is unhelpful. We do not agree with it and I do not believe it is right. As we have previously stated, Israel has a right to take action in self-defence against Hamas. It is important that it does that in accordance with international humanitarian law, and we will continue to make that point to it.

Richard Burgon (Labour): We are now in a very dangerous moment, when the war in Gaza risks spreading into a much wider and even more deadly war across the middle east. There is a real risk that our country will find itself in yet another war in the middle east that it cannot get out of easily. To avoid any wider war, do we not now need an emphasis on de-escalation and diplomatic efforts? Does the need to seek such a wider diplomatic solution not make it more urgent to be pushing for a ceasefire in Gaza?

col 606 **The Prime Minister:** As I said, no one wants to see the conflict in Gaza go on a moment longer than is necessary. We support a ceasefire, but it must be a sustainable ceasefire that will last. That means Hamas no longer in power in Gaza and no longer able to threaten Israel with rocket attacks and other forms of terrorism. Hamas simply do not represent the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations.

col 607 **Debbie Abrahams (Labour):** As much as the Houthis might wish to conflate their piracy with support for the Palestinian people, their indiscriminate attacks on shipping from across the world indicate otherwise. But while I agree that under international law there was justification for this military intervention, what was the Prime Minister's assessment of the risk that the action could ignite conflict across the middle east, and of apparent double standards in when the UK or its allies choose to observe international law?

The Prime Minister: We always strive to ensure that we comply with international law, as we did in this case, but we should also recognise the risks of inaction. Doing nothing would very clearly weaken international security and the rule of law, and damage freedom of navigation and the global economy. Crucially, it would send a very dangerous message: that British vessels, British lives and British interests are fair game. That is not something we could allow to stand.

col 608 **Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat):** Nothing angers me more than those who choose to use the plight of the Palestinians to further their own nefarious ends. That

applies to Iran primarily, but also to its proxies. Does the Prime Minister accept that the best way to pull the rug from under the Iranian regime is to achieve that two-state solution by way of an immediate bilateral ceasefire in this conflict?

The Prime Minister: As I have said previously, we do support a ceasefire but it must be sustainable, and multiple things have to happen for it to be so. As I have also said previously, we remain committed to a two-state solution, because I believe in a future ... in which Palestinian and Israeli people can live side by side in peace and security and in which everyone can live their lives with dignity and opportunity. That is the future that we are striving to build.

Matt Western (Labour): ... the escalation and conflagration of the situation in the middle east, which has seen 23,000 deaths of civilians including children, is not only shocking but is now extending to a crisis of other nations and across the world. Does the Prime Minister agree that we need to see a negotiated ceasefire in Gaza, and that ultimately, 30 years on from the Oslo accords, we have to see a "land for peace" negotiated deal?

The Prime Minister: No one wants to see this conflict go on a moment longer than is necessary. We support a ceasefire, but it must be a sustainable ceasefire that will last. That means Hamas releasing hostages, but also no longer being able to threaten Israel with rocket attacks and other forms of terrorism. In the meantime, we will do everything we can to get more aid into Gaza.

Alan Brown (SNP): It is obvious that the longer the conflict in Gaza goes on, the more innocent civilian casualties there will be and the greater the risk of wider escalation in the region. Is it not the case that if the UK is to be seen as an honest broker, the Prime Minister, as well as rightly condemning Hamas, needs to call out Israel for clear breaches of humanitarian law and call for an immediate ceasefire? With actors such as China now calling for an international conference to set a timetable for a two-state solution, would it not be better if the UK were doing something constructive to get that two-state solution in place?

The Prime Minister: We continue to call for international humanitarian law to be respected and for civilians to be protected. Too many civilians have been killed and, as I have made clear, Israel should do more to ensure that its campaign is targeted on Hamas leaders and their operatives.

col 609 **Beth Winter (Labour):** ... If the Houthi operations continue as they have done in the last couple of days, and if the UK and US military responses persist, what is the endgame? How much death and destruction is this country risking if we do not prioritise the cessation of military action not only in Yemen and the Red sea but, crucially, in Gaza, the west bank and Israel?

The Prime Minister: ... it is the Houthis who are conducting illegal strikes on civilian shipping. To do nothing in the face of that would be to weaken our security and leave British interests and lives at risk.

Emma Hardy (Labour): Many people are deeply worried about the escalation of hostilities and the growing instability across the region. There must be an accelerated determination to bring about an urgently needed ceasefire in Gaza and hostage release. ...

The Prime Minister: As I have said, in all cases there is a risk of inaction in the face of attacks on civilian lives and British interests, and it would have been wrong to do nothing. ...

Gavin Newlands (SNP): The Prime Minister rightly said that we must condemn the Houthis and their illegal strikes on innocent civilians to protect the rule of law, so will he also condemn Israel's illegal strikes against innocent civilians, including 10,000 dead children, to protect the self-same rule of law?

col 610 **The Prime Minister:** As I have said repeatedly, we are deeply concerned about the devastating impact of the fighting in Gaza on the civilian population. Too many people have lost their lives already and there is a desperate need to increase humanitarian support to Gaza. That is what we are doing, as well as calling on

Israel to abide by international humanitarian law and do everything it can to protect civilian life.

Andy Slaughter (Labour): There is greater conflict in the middle east now than there has been for many years—in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, as well as in Yemen, Israel and Palestine—much of it stoked by hostile actors. The Prime Minister has told us what his military response is, but what specific diplomatic initiative is he pursuing to promote Britain’s historic role to achieve peace in the middle east?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will know that I was one of the first foreign leaders to visit the region after the attacks, and I met all the leaders from across the region, including all the Arab states and President Abbas from the Palestinian Authority. We are working with them to make sure they have the capability for a post-Gaza future and on how best to deliver that, as well as working with other Arab partners on increasing the supply of aid and to work towards a more peaceful long-term future.

Jonathan Edwards (Independent): The Prime Minister has emphasised throughout this urgent statement that our action was not an act of escalation, but surely the key determinant of that is how it is perceived by forces in the middle east and by the wider Arab population. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt—countries we would not describe as anti-western in any way—have all expressed varying degrees of concern. Is the Prime Minister not worried that many of the key players in the region view the military action as escalatory?

col 611 **The Prime Minister:** ... We should recognise the risks of inaction. To do nothing, as I said, would be to weaken international security and the rule of law. ... Crucially, to do nothing would send a dangerous message that British vessels, British interests and British lives are fair game. That would be completely unacceptable, which is why it is right that we acted.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-15/debates/52945864-28EB-49AC-B933-33B546DF75B6/DefendingTheUKAndAllies>

The statement about the proscription of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, referred to above, can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-declares-hizb-ut-tahrir-as-terrorists>

Point of Order

Zarah Sultana (Labour): ... In the statement, the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) implied that I had given a “free pass” to the terrorists who carried out the 7 October attacks. That claim is grotesquely untrue. My question to the Prime Minister in no way had that implication. I was calling for de-escalation in the region and for an immediate ceasefire, so the hon. Gentleman’s accusation is absolutely untrue. In this House and elsewhere, I have repeatedly condemned the actions of Hamas and called for the release of all hostages. Moreover, his gross accusation plays to a racist trope by implying that, because I am a Muslim, I support Hamas. With rising Islamophobia and racist tropes asking British Muslims to prove their loyalty, Mr Deputy Speaker, may I ask you for guidance on how to get a full retraction and an apology from the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole?

Andrew Percy (Conservative): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. As loth as I am to engage in this silliness, let me be absolutely clear to the hon. Lady that not only did I not reference her, but I have on numerous occasions—*[Interruption.]* If she will listen to my response, I have said on numerous occasions that too many people have failed to call out what I think is unacceptable behaviour. I have said that before, and I am not going to stop saying that, on occasion, I think people have given a free pass to this behaviour

and have not dealt with it with a fair hand. That is an open point of debate. I have called out people on my own side for that—[*Interruption.*] Will she listen to me? It has absolutely nothing to do with this.

I do not want to engage in this silliness, but I say to the hon. Lady that I have absolutely no intention of implying that she is any way—[*Interruption.*] Let me respond. I have no intention of implying that she in any way supports that. I am sure she does not, I did not say that and I would never say it. However, I am also not going to not say what I think in this House or to stop calling people out. On this issue, I think too many people in this place are giving a free pass to one side while not acknowledging the horrors that the other side suffered.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Nigel Evans): I will allow that, on both sides, to stand on the record.
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-15/debates/12EBF401-EF99-4F49-9B55-FFCC340E9B88/PointsOfOrder>

House of Commons Written Answers

Visas: Gaza

Kirsten Oswald (SNP) [8033] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether it is his Department's policy to waive the visa fee for children leaving Gaza who are non-British citizens with family residing in the UK.

Tom Pursglove: Applicants outside of the UK wishing to apply to join/accompany a family member who is a British national; or a person present and settled in the UK, with a view to residing in the UK, may apply for a fee waiver if they consider they cannot afford the fee.

There is no fee attached to applications submitted under Appendix Family Reunion to the Immigration Rules.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8033>

Arms Trade: Israel

Zarah Sultana (Labour) [9094] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, with reference to the oral evidence by the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 9 January 2023, if she will make an assessment of the implications for her policy on arms export licences to Israel of the evidence provided by the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs on whether Israel is complying with international law in its military engagement in Gaza.

Greg Hands: The Government continues to monitor closely the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, which includes Criterion 2, covering 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/2024-01-10/9094>

The oral evidence referred to above can be read at

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

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Arms Trade: Israel

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [8250] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will make it her policy to (a) monitor and (b) report on the impact of UK-supplied arms on civilians in the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Greg Hands: The UK export licensing system is based on having a thorough risk-assessment process for the original export licence before the goods leave the UK. We rigorously assess every application on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria (the SELC).

The SELC provide a thorough risk assessment framework for export licence applications and require us to think hard about the impact of providing equipment and its capabilities. We will not license the export of equipment where to do so would be inconsistent with the SELC. These are not decisions we take lightly. Our assessments draw on all available information relevant to the criteria in the case, including reports from NGOs and our overseas network.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8250>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Arms Trade: Israel

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [8248] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many arms licences have been issued to Israel in the last five years; and what those licences were for.

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [8249] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will publish a breakdown of the type of military equipment which has been licensed for export to Israel in last five years.

Greg Hands: HM Government publishes data on export licensing decisions on a quarterly basis in the Official Statistics, including data on outcome, end user destination, overall value, type (e.g. military, other) and a summary of the items covered by these licences. This data is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-export-controls-licensing-data>

The most recent publication was on 30th August 2023, and covered the period 1st January – 31st March 2023. Information covering 1st April – 30th June 2023 will be published on 16th January 2024.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8248>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8249>

Israel: Gaza

Dan Carden (Labour) [8105] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the case launched against Israel at the UN's international court of justice by the Republic of South Africa.

Andrew Mitchell: We do not believe this case is a particularly helpful development or will contribute to a sustainable peace between Israelis and Palestinians. We recognise that Israel has the right to take necessary and proportionate action in self-defence against Hamas, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law.

But as I [Minister Mitchell] said on 8 December in Parliament, we respect the independence of the International Court of Justice.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8105>

Parliament did not sit on 8 December. The above reference may be to the following comments made on 8 January.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-08/debates/AFB7B263-C4D4-4B7E-B7B3-EED39C534A63/IsraelAndPalestine#contribution-41EFAEDF-6CF1-4A39-B5D4-DDCF1827C4ED>

and

Gaza: Internally Displaced People

Dan Carden (Labour) [8108] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what diplomatic steps he is taking to prevent the mass displacement of Palestinians from Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: We maintain a continuous dialogue with Israel on the humanitarian situation, including in relation to the displacement of Palestinian civilians. About 1.9 million people in Gaza, or nearly 85% of the population, are estimated to be internally displaced. However, obtaining an accurate count is challenging, especially given difficulties in tracking Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) staying with host families, movement of IDPs following evacuation orders and access restrictions. The UK firmly rejects any suggestion of the resettlement of Palestinians outside of Gaza. We support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8108>

Jerusalem: Cultural Heritage

Tommy Sheppard (SNP) [8472] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the situation in the Cows Garden site of the Armenian Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Andrew Mitchell: We have not held discussions with Israeli counterparts on the situation in the Cow Garden site of the Armenian Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem. The UK is monitoring the situation and are clear on the need to avoid any further rise in tensions. The UK's position on the status of Jerusalem is clear and long-standing: it should be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states. The UK is a strong supporter of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and an advocate for the integrity of cultural important areas to be respected. The UK continues to take a strong stance against settler violence, and urges Israel to take stronger action to stop settler violence and hold the perpetrators accountable.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-08/8472>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Israel and Palestine

The Urgent Answer given in the Commons was read in the Lords.

col 226 Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): ... Andrew Mitchell in the other place referred to the ICJ case that was being pursued by South Africa and said that we would follow and respect its decision. But international humanitarian law is broader than that simple case. What are we doing to support the ICC to have adequate access, support and resources to properly investigate all breaches of international humanitarian law? Clearly, this is an issue that concerns all our global partners.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon): ... I can say no more about the ICJ case than that the ICJ is an institution that we support and that we await the outcome of the case. It is extremely important, for all concerned, that international humanitarian law is upheld. In all our interactions, we look to ensure—recently, my noble friend the Foreign Secretary engaged directly with senior representatives of the Israeli

Government—that this point is made very clearly. Unlike Hamas, Israel is a state and it has obligations in this respect, which it recognises. ...

Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat): ... There have now been 101 days of this violence, and we have now seen the reports of 8,000 innocent Palestinian children being killed, and 150 UN workers also dying in the violence. The Israeli Government have said that their strikes have been targeted and proportionate, but analysis by the *Financial Times* before Christmas showed that the devastation of buildings in north Gaza is now more than it was in Dresden and Cologne, and is comparable to Hamburg. The Israeli forces have been using 2,000-pound bombs, which are four times the size that allies used in Mosul against ISIS, and have been using unguided munitions that date back to the Korean and Vietnam wars. The Government have said that they have monitoring aircraft in the region, which are being used to identify potential Hamas terrorists. That is to be welcomed, but are the Government also monitoring the use of the unguided so-called “dumb bombs” that have been raining down on Gaza, causing massive civilian damage? This will be evidence when it comes to any potential legal challenges, so are the Government collating the information?

col 227 **Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... the loss of life we saw in the terrorist attacks on 7 October, and subsequently the loss of so many innocent lives in Gaza, is something we all deplore. That is why the Government have been working extensively ... to ensure that we get the agreements in place to allow for humanitarian support to be provided to those most in need. No one needs to demonstrate how the situation in Gaza is being played out; we have seen it. There is acute need, particularly for the most vulnerable, and women and children in particular—70% of those who have been killed are women and children. I alluded to the importance of collating evidence earlier as well. There are international institutions looking at this, and Israel itself is a responsible state that has responsibilities under various agreements it has signed. Now is the time to focus on getting that sustainable ceasefire, so we can see that rebuilding, getting support in and also, let us not forget, getting the hostages out who have been held since 7 October.

Lord Turnberg (Labour): My Lords, the war would end tomorrow if the hostages were released, but is it not time to call out the role of Iran in all of this? Although Iran is apparently keeping out of it, it is promoting Hamas to carry out its horrible acts, and pushing the Houthis into the direction they are taking. Without Iran, they would not be doing this. Is it not time we told them to stop?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I assure the noble Lord that we have done exactly that. While there may not be direct operational instruction from Iran to those militias that are being supported—not just those that have been supported in the Occupied Territories, but those further afield—I assure the noble Lord that we are making that case. ...

Lord Polak (Conservative): My Lords, I agree entirely with the noble Lord, Lord Turnberg. There are still over 130 hostages—men, women and children—being held in Gaza, and we should not forget them. Like other noble Lords in this House, we had the difficult opportunity to visit Kfar Aza down in the south of Israel last week. It was horrific. I was able to say the memorial prayer to the son of my friend, Netta Epstein, who died when he jumped on a grenade to save the life of his fiancée. But would my noble friend agree that there is some small light in the darkness? That is the Abraham Accords. I will be specific and mention the Kingdom of Bahrain; its understanding and support, not only in the fight against Hamas but also against the Houthis, is that small light.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, first of all, on my noble friend’s point on hostages, I myself, along with the Foreign Secretary, have met with various members of the families of hostages currently being held. I assure noble Lords that we are doing our utmost with those who have influence to ensure their release as

well as their safety at the current time. ...

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench): My Lords, I have visited Auschwitz and seen something of the suffering of the Jewish people, and I appreciate the wonderful contribution the community is making to this country. But should we be silent and look the other way when every human rights organisation, the United Nations, Amnesty International and others point to gross abuse of human rights in Gaza? Should we look the other way when Benjamin Netanyahu compares the Palestinians with the Amaleks, who, according to the Bible, God ordered the Jews to slaughter—every man, woman, child and infant in the cradle—or when he says that the 25% of the Israeli population who are Palestinians have no rights, or when the Defence Minister states: “We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly”?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, far from it. We are not looking the other way. We have a strong relationship with Israel and are making very forceful points to the Government of Israel about their responsibility. I have stood at this Dispatch Box a number of times, and the Israeli Government recognise their duty and obligation, aside from to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, to the 21% to 22% of the population of the State of Israel who are non-Jewish, which includes many Christians and Muslims.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-01-15/debates/88C4C75E-C9FD-4268-B98E-4597FD3878B0/IsraelAndPalestine>

The Financial Times article referred to above can be read at

<https://www.ft.com/content/f6ef59c3-b1a5-4772-9266-b9fc2c4e3abf>

Defending the UK and Allies

[The Prime Minister's statement in the Commons](#) was read in the House of Lords.

col 268 **Baroness Smith of Basildon (Labour):** ... this situation has been escalating over several weeks, putting lives at risk and causing considerable disruption to international shipping. First, we concur that the Government were right to do all they could to end such attacks through international diplomatic routes. ...

col 269 However, when it became apparent that these diplomatic efforts were not working, it was also right that the Government acted in self-defence following further direct attacks on our Navy and US warships. So we back this limited and targeted action to reinforce maritime security in the Red Sea. We strongly condemn the Houthi attacks targeting commercial ships of all nationalities, putting civilians and military personnel—including British forces—in serious danger. ...

The international community clearly stands against the Houthi attacks. ...

The UK's response was proportionate and targeted to avoid civilian casualties. ...

We are not clear yet whether this is a short-term targeted response or part of an ongoing campaign from the Houthis, but can the Leader of the House confirm that the strategic objective is to degrade or destroy the capability to launch attacks on international shipping? ...

Our primary objective has to be the avoidance of escalation across the Middle East ...

None of us wants to see this proportionate act of self-defence being exploited by those in the region who seek to expand and escalate violence. ...

col 270 It is now more than 100 days since the shockingly brutal events of 7 October. Israel's right to self-defence is fundamental yet, the longer the conflict in Gaza rages, the more the risk of escalation throughout the entire region grows. All our thoughts are with the civilians who have been, and continue to be, caught up in this horrific war. As my noble friend Lord Collins of Highbury confirmed earlier today in your Lordships' House, we

welcome the efforts to secure UN Resolution 2720 and the Government's commitment to seeking a sustained ceasefire, which would deliver the humanitarian support that is so desperately needed.

In the same way that we should seek to avoid escalation in the Red Sea, we must also urge restraint on the Israel-Lebanon border and make it crystal clear to parties that the UK does not support this conflict extending into Lebanon. On the issue of humanitarian support into Gaza, can the Minister say anything about other routes that may be looked at in order to provide such support, such as via the Royal Navy or airdrops? How are the Government supporting the diplomatic process that is being brokered by the US envoy to prevent a full-scale war breaking out across that border between Israel and Lebanon?

Lord Newby (Liberal Democrat): ... As the Statement makes clear, our military action follows not only a direct attack on our warships but some 25 other attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea over recent weeks. These attacks not only jeopardised many lives but were and are threatening the continued operation of the sea route through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, which plays such a vital role in the world trading system. We therefore also believe that the UK had little option but to act.

The challenge in these circumstances is always whether the action we take will have a lasting deterrent effect and whether it is proportionate. Whether it has a lasting effect on the Houthis remains to be seen, but it was certainly limited in scope and was, in our view, proportionate to the attacks that we had suffered. ...

col 271 Prime Minister says that this action is completely unrelated to what is happening in Gaza, but there is surely some link. It is therefore reassuring to hear the Prime Minister repeat that the Government will continue to work towards a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza and getting more aid to civilians. Can the Minister say anything about this work and give the Government's assessment of the likelihood of aid being increased in the short term and of achieving a ceasefire at some point in the coming days and weeks? ...

col 272 **The Lord Privy Seal (Lord True):** ... The noble Baroness was quite right to point out that these events followed weeks if not months of continuing activity by the Houthis ... I think it was on 16 December 2023 that the HMS "Diamond" brought down an attack of drones targeting commercial shipping in the Red Sea. ...

Our strategy and intent, and the intent of the international community, is to ensure and maintain the principle of free and open navigation. A clear signal has been sent to the Houthis, in a different form of language from the very clear signals that were sent before. We hope very much that in time it will be heeded and that we can restore international law and the rule of order in the Red Sea. ...

col 273 So far as Israel and Gaza are concerned, we absolutely reject the absurd Houthi claim that this is anything to do with the Israel and Gaza conflict. The Houthis were firing on ships that had nothing to do with Israel. This is a completely false narrative and we should not fall into the trap ... of linking it in the way that the Houthis suggest.

Of course, we would love to see the conflict in Israel and Gaza somehow come to a conclusion. No one wants to see it go on a moment longer than necessary and we support a sustainable ceasefire, as the Prime Minister has made clear, but it must be sustainable—one that will last. That means, frankly, Hamas no longer in power in Gaza and able to threaten Israel with rocket attacks and other forms of terrorism. Hamas does not represent the Palestinians' legitimate aspirations. Perhaps some of those who charge around on the streets of our kingdom might recognise that and think of it for a moment.

However ... ahead of a sustainable ceasefire, we want to see immediate and sustained humanitarian pauses to get more aid in and hostages out, helping to create the conditions for a durable peace. A sustainable ceasefire would be just the first step.

In our dialogue and that of the Foreign Secretary, we are looking at ways to get

more humanitarian aid in, as and how we can. We have encouraged the Israeli Government to facilitate some access from the sea, without going into specific places or points. ...

col 274 **Baroness Falkner of Margravine (Crossbench):** ... we have seen an escalation provoked entirely by Iran and its proxies, but we must be on our guard not to fall into the trap of provocation leading to a wider conflagration. ...

Baroness Goldie (Conservative): My Lords, I unequivocally support the action that the Government have taken and observe that it was not only the right course of action but the only course of action. ...

col 275 **Lord Browne of Ladyton (Labour):** ... Given that the domestic popularity of the Houthis was ebbing until the outbreak of hostilities in Israel/Gaza, and that they derive almost all their support from fostering a sense of anti-western grievance, what assessment has the Foreign Office made of this hypothesis that the Houthis have foreseen and deliberately provoked military reprisals?

No one should dispute, and certainly I do not, that our air strikes, which in the words of the Prime Minister were “intended as a limited, single action”, were proportionate and justified. But we must be mindful that we may have degraded Houthi offensive capabilities at the price of increasing their domestic political support. ...

col 276 **Lord True:** ... very careful and calibrated warnings have been given here. But with this aggression—if one wants to use that word; frankly, it is tantamount to a piratical attempt to interrupt the right of people all over the world to trade and move, and use the freedom of the seas—there is ... a cost to inaction. ...

col 278 We have agreed with the Government of Saudi Arabia to co-ordinate action on supporting regional security. The Prime Minister also discussed humanitarian aid for Gaza. ...

col 279 **Lord Stevens of Birmingham (Crossbench):** ... Although the Prime Minister’s Statement is careful, for diplomatic reasons, to say that action was unrelated to other events in the Middle East, it clearly is related to the malign influence of Iran on the Houthis, as far as Hamas is concerned, and in the threat that Hezbollah poses to Israel on its northern border. As Israel confronts hundreds of thousands of Hezbollah missiles aimed at its northern border, with over 100,000 Israeli citizens evacuated and Hezbollah still not having pulled back above the Litani river, as required by UN Security Council Resolution 1701, what further pressure can western powers, including His Majesty’s Government, bring to bear on Iran to get the Hezbollah terrorists to cease and desist?

Lord True: My Lords, it is quite clear that the behaviour of the Iranian regime, including the actions of the revolutionary guards, poses a significant threat to the safety and security of the United Kingdom and our allies. Indeed, Iran’s direct threats to dissidents in the UK are also concerning. ... the noble Lord is quite right to say that, although Hamas alone was responsible for carrying out the attacks, Iran bears responsibility for the actions of groups such as those he has referred to and the Houthis, who it has long supported politically, financially and militarily. ...

Lord Lancaster of Kimbolton (Conservative): ... I recognise that there is no connection to what is happening in Israel and Gaza. However, that view is not necessarily held by some in the region. I simply ask my noble friend to continue to argue the case that there is no link. ...

col 280 **Lord True:** ... I can promise my noble friend that we will certainly continue to make the distinction between protecting international shipping and the situation in Gaza, because that is the truth of the matter. As I said in my first response, the Houthis were firing on ships that had absolutely nothing to do with Israel. That is an activity which must cease. ...

col 281 **Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green):** ... can the Leader of the House tell me hand on heart that the US and UK Governments have a long-term plan for peace and

stability for the region of the Red Sea and more broadly, rather than being drawn again into a conflict without any long-term plan? Given that today the death toll in Gaza has exceeded 24,000, will the UK Government call for a ceasefire now?

Lord True: My Lords, I have referred to the British Government's desire to see a sustainable ceasefire, but I have set out some of the conditions and the state in which that would happen. The noble Baroness forgets very quickly the bestial attack that was made on Israel by Hamas, and Hamas must be dealt with. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-01-15/debates/2409408A-8A34-4C13-8321-F51B46433045/DefendingTheUKAndAllies>

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))

House of Commons Library Briefing

UK and international response to Houthis in the Red Sea 2024

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9930/CBP-9930.pdf>

United Nations

'We Cannot See in Lebanon What We Are Seeing in Gaza,' Says Secretary-General, Warning of Regional Escalation

... More than 100 days have passed since the horrific 7 October attacks by Hamas that claimed the lives of more than 1,000 Israelis and others and resulted in the brutal seizing of hostages.

Every day I think of the anguish of the families I met.

I once again demand the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. In the interim, they must be treated humanely and allowed to receive visits and assistance from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The accounts of sexual violence committed by Hamas and others on 7 October must be rigorously investigated and prosecuted.

Nothing can justify the deliberate killing, injuring and kidnapping of civilians — or the launching of rockets towards civilian targets.

At the same time, the onslaught on Gaza by Israeli forces over these 100 days has unleashed wholesale destruction and levels of civilian killings at a rate that is unprecedented during my years as Secretary-General.

The vast majority of those killed are women and children.

Nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people. ...

Traumatized people are being pushed into increasingly limited areas in the south that are becoming intolerably and dangerously congested.

While there have been some steps to increase the flow of humanitarian assistance into Gaza, life-saving relief is not getting to people who have endured months of relentless assault at anywhere near the scale needed. ...

I am deeply troubled by the clear violation of international humanitarian law that we are witnessing. ...

An effective aid operation in Gaza — or anywhere else — requires certain basics. It requires security. It requires an environment where staff can work in safety. It requires the necessary logistics and the resumption of commercial activity. ...

The vast majority of our Palestinian staff in Gaza have been forced to flee their homes. Since 7 October, 152 UN staff members have been killed in Gaza — the largest single loss of life in the history of our organization ...

Still, aid workers, under enormous pressure and with no safety guarantees, are doing their best to deliver inside Gaza. ...

Second, the aid operation faces significant hurdles at the Gaza border.

Vital materials — including life-saving medical equipment and parts which are critical for the repair of water facilities and infrastructure — have been rejected with little or no explanation, disrupting the flow of critical supplies and the resumption of basic services.

And when one item is denied, the time-consuming approval process starts again from scratch for the entire cargo.

Third, the aid operation faces major impediments to distribution within Gaza. ...

Humanitarian notification systems to maximize the safety of aid operations are not being respected.

In addition, frequent telecommunications blackouts mean humanitarian workers cannot seek out the safest roads, coordinate aid distribution or track the movements of displaced people who need assistance. ...

The parties must respect international humanitarian law — respect and protect civilians, and ensure their essential needs are met. ...

Meanwhile, the cauldron of tensions in the occupied West Bank is boiling over with heightened violence compounding an already dire fiscal crisis for the Palestinian Authority. Tensions are also sky-high in the Red Sea and beyond — and may soon be impossible to contain.

I have serious concerns about daily exchanges of fire across the Blue Line.

This risks triggering a broader escalation between Israel and Lebanon and profoundly affecting regional stability.

Tens of thousands of people in northern Israel and southern Lebanon have been displaced by the fighting and humanitarian access in Lebanon continues to be constrained. ...

There is one solution to help address all these issues.

We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. ...

We cannot see in Lebanon what we are seeing in Gaza. And we cannot allow what has been happening in Gaza to continue.

To read the full transcript see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22105.doc.htm>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Over one hundred days into the war, Israel destroying Gaza's food system and weaponizing food, say UN human rights experts

Gazans now make up 80 per cent of all people facing famine or catastrophic hunger worldwide, marking an unparalleled humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip amid Israel's continued bombardment and siege, according to UN human rights experts.

“Currently every single person in Gaza is hungry, a quarter of the population are starving and struggling to find food and drinkable water, and famine is imminent. Pregnant women are not receiving adequate nutrition and healthcare, putting their lives at risk. In addition all children under five – 335,000 – are at high risk of severe malnutrition as the risk of famine conditions continues to increase, a whole generation is now in danger of suffering from stunting,” said the experts....

Since 9 October, Israel declared and imposed a “total siege” on Gaza, depriving 2.3 million Palestinians of water, food, fuel, medicine, and medical supplies, this against the backdrop of a 17-year Israeli blockade, which before this war made approximately half of the people in Gaza food insecure and more than 80 percent reliant on humanitarian aid.

While the majority of aid distribution is concentrated in the southern governorates, since 1 January, only 21 per cent (5 out of 24) of planned deliveries of aid containing food and other lifesaving supplies reached their destination north of Wadi Gaza. ...

“It is unprecedented to make an entire civilian population go hungry this completely and quickly. Israel is destroying Gaza’s food system and using food as a weapon against the Palestinian people.”

Israel is destroying and blocking access to farmland and the sea. Recent reports allege that since Israeli military’s ground offensive started on 27 October, approximately 22% of agricultural land, including orchards, greenhouses, and farmland in northern Gaza, has been razed by Israeli forces. Israel has reportedly destroyed approximately 70% of Gaza’s fishing fleet. ... Meanwhile, access to safe water continues to diminish while the healthcare system has collapsed due to the wide-spread destruction of hospitals, significantly heightening the spread of communicable diseases.

Israel has also destroyed more than 60% of Palestinian homes in Gaza, directly affecting the ability to cook any food, and causing [domicide](#) through the mass destruction of dwellings, making the territory uninhabitable. ...

“We have raised the alarm of the [risk of genocide several times](#) reminding all governments they have a duty to prevent genocide. Not only is Israel killing and causing irreparable harm against Palestinian civilians with its indiscriminate bombardments, it is also knowingly and intentionally imposing a high rate of disease, prolonged malnutrition, dehydration, and starvation by destroying civilian infrastructure,” said the experts. ...

“Our alarm for the unfolding genocide does not only refer to the ongoing bombardment of Gaza but also concerns the slow suffering and death caused by Israel’s long-standing occupation, blockade and current civic destruction, since genocide advances through an ongoing process and is not a singular event.” ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/over-one-hundred-days-war-israel-destroying-gazas-food-system-and>

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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>

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>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

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>

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