



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answer

Topical Questions: Treasury

Sajid Javid (Conservative): The Chancellor will be aware of a proposal from the World War Muslim Memorial Trust to establish a memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum, honouring an estimated 750,000 Muslims who have fought for the British armed forces, with tens of thousands of them paying the ultimate sacrifice. Previous Budgets have supported memorials that honour those who have given us the freedoms that we enjoy. May I ask the Chancellor to personally consider this proposal and help make it a reality?

Jeremy Hunt: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right: we must remember and honour the sacrifices made by those of all nationalities and religions who fought for our freedom, including, I believe, nearly 150,000 Muslims who died in the second world war. My officials would be happy to engage with him to identify how best the Government can help make this vision a reality.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-06/debates/73B4084D-688B-4DF1-8037-4AFE9DDF3AD6/TopicalQuestions#contribution-F252978C-915F-40B6-9285-D016B47F5B2E>

House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Religion: Education

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [11621] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what her Department's policy is on the classification of religious education as a school subject; and what funding she has allocated to support the teaching of (a) religious education and (b) national curriculum core subjects in each of the last five years.

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [11622] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Ofsted Annual Report 2022/23, what plans her Department has to reduce the variation in the standards of teaching of religious education; and what assessment she has made of the potential merits of adding the subject to the national curriculum.

Damian Hinds: Religious Education (RE) is an important part of a school's curriculum and can contribute to a young person's personal, social and academic development. When taught well, the subject develops children's knowledge of British values and traditions, helps them to better understand those of other countries, and refines pupils' ability to construct well-informed, balanced and structured arguments. This is why it remains a compulsory subject in all state-funded schools in England for each pupil up to the age of 18.

The government read Ofsted's 2023 report with interest. Whilst there is no specific allocation of funding for RE curriculum programmes, the department does provide support for RE teaching in a number of other ways, particularly in relation to teaching quality.

The department is offering a £10,000 bursary for RE trainee teachers that are starting initial teacher training courses in the 2024/25 academic year.

To support teachers when they are in post, and to ensure high standards and consistency of RE teaching, RE resources will be procured by Oak National Academy during the second tranche of its work. Oak will work closely with the sector and utilise sector experience when producing new materials for RE. This will ensure that high-quality lessons are available nationwide, benefitting both teachers and pupils, should schools opt to use them. Oak RE resources will be available for teaching from autumn 2024, with full packages expected to be available by autumn 2025.

The department also continues to offer eight-week subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses in the 2022/23 academic year for candidates who have the potential to become outstanding teachers but need to increase their subject knowledge. The eight week SKE course, available in RE, can be undertaken on a full time or part time basis but must be completed before qualified teacher status can be recommended and awarded. Eligible candidates could be entitled to a SKE bursary of £175 per week to support them financially whilst completing their SKE course.

More information on these courses is available here:

www.gov.uk/guidance/subject-knowledge-enhancement-an-introduction

The core national curriculum subjects of English, mathematics and science have received an estimated £290 million over the past five years. Allocated funding for English facilitates the English hubs programme, which is a school-to-school improvement programme that focusses on systematic synthetic phonics, early language and reading for pleasure. It also facilitates Poetry By Heart, which is a national poetry speaking competition for schools. The funding for mathematics supports the implementation of programmes that aim to improve the teaching of mathematics from age 4 to 18 and to increase participation in post-16 mathematics. Similarly for science, this funding supports programmes which aim to improve the

subject expertise of teachers and improve workforce capacity and confidence for science teachers.

In the Schools White Paper, the department has committed not to make any changes to the curriculum for the remainder of this Parliament, in order to provide stability for schools and pupils following the pandemic.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/11621>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/11622>

The Ofsted report referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/655f2551c39e5a001392e4ca/31587_ofsted_annual_report_2022-23_web.pdf

The White Paper referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62416cb5d3bf7f32add7819f/opportunity_for_all_strong_schools_with_great_teachers_for_your_child_print_version.pdf

UK Parliament Ministerial Statement

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill: Public Consultation

The Minister for Security (Tom Tugendhat) [HCWS240] Today the Government have launched a public consultation on the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill. ...

The Government reaffirmed their commitment to introduce this important piece of legislation in the King's Speech on 7 November 2023. ...

Overview

The threat picture is complex, evolving, and enduring, with terrorists choosing to attack a broad range of locations. Since the start of 2017 there have been 14 terror attacks in the UK. Too many have sadly lost their lives.

The Bill will ensure premises in the UK are better prepared for terrorist attacks by requiring them to take necessary but proportionate steps according to their capacity to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack and reduce harm. ...

Following an 18-week public consultation on proposals in 2021, the Government confirmed their intention to bring forward the Bill in December 2022. To ensure the measures can meaningfully enhance public safety while remaining proportionate, we requested that the Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) conduct pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill, which was published in May 2023.

Pre-legislative scrutiny, as well as our extensive engagement programme, provided important feedback from parliamentarians, businesses and other key stakeholders. This feedback particularly focused on the application of the proposals in relation to standard duty premises. These premises—the Standard Tier—are smaller, being largely those with a capacity of 100 to 799 individuals, e.g. many retail stores, bars, restaurants, theatres and village halls.

Next steps

On the strength of that feedback, we have revised the Standard Tier requirements to make them clearer and more proportionate, while ensuring they deliver on their primary objective: to implement simple procedures which could reduce harm and save lives in the event of a suspected attack. ...

Consultation

This new approach is considered to be more proportionate, meaningful, effective and transparent than that previously agreed for the following reasons:

The purpose of the primary duty is now outcome-focused, aligns with comparable regimes—i.e. Health and Safety—and removes any previous assumptions around the Standard Tier requirements being too instructive and rigid, i.e. a “tick box” exercise.

It brings greater clarity to costs and expectations, i.e. the Standard Tier holds no legal requirement for premises to consider physical security measures, but focuses on procedures and the actions people working at the premises should take in response to an attack.

It measures all premises in scope against the same standard of “reasonably practicable”. This approach is better suited to the wide range of organisations that will be within scope of the Standard Tier because they will assess and implement procedures that are suitable for their individual circumstances. The “reasonably practicable” test includes what is financially feasible for premises.

We have moved away from a prescribed training requirement—i.e. a one size fits all package for all relevant staff. Instead, those responsible will be required to ensure that their procedures are adequately communicated and practised by relevant staff. Again, in implementing relevant procedures, those responsible will be held to a “reasonably practicable” standard.

The consultation seeks specific feedback on these measures to ensure the updated requirements proposed for Standard Tier premises are appropriate.

It also seeks respondents’ views on how any costs incurred by the Standard Tier requirements should be met and how premises currently meet similar obligations under Health and Safety and Fire Safety legislation.

The consultation will run until 18 March 2024 and is available on www.gov.uk. It is open to the public, and is targeted at organisations, businesses, and local and public authorities, and/or individuals who own or operate premises that the proposed Bill would affect. We particularly welcome views from those responsible for the smaller premises which would fall within the Standard Tier, especially those in the community and voluntary sector.

I am looking forward to concluding the consultation process, which will support the Government in finalising the legislation and ensuring it is robust and delivers on its core aims ahead of a formal introduction to Parliament. ...

To read the full statement see

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-05/debates/2402056000010/Terrorism\(ProtectionOfPremises\)BillPublicConsultation](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-05/debates/2402056000010/Terrorism(ProtectionOfPremises)BillPublicConsultation)

The Home Affairs Committee report referred to above can be read at

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41090/documents/204669/default/>

To read the consultation referred to above see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/martyns-law-standard-tier-consultation>

Scottish Government

First Minister's meeting with Jewish student representatives minutes: January 2024

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/first-minister-meeting-with-jewish-student-representatives/>

Bristol Employment Tribunal

Judgement: Dr David Miller -v- University of Bristol

The claimant was employed by the respondent from 1 September 2018 to 1 October 2021 as Professor of Political Sociology. He contends that since at least March 2019 he was subject to an organised campaign by groups and individuals opposed to his anti-Zionist views, which was aimed at securing his dismissal. Further, he alleges that the respondent failed to investigate or support him in respect of this campaign and instead subjected him to discriminatory and unfair misconduct proceedings which culminated eventually in his summary dismissal. The discrimination is said to arise because the

claimant says his anti-Zionist beliefs qualify as a protected philosophical belief pursuant to sections 4 and 10 Equality Act 2010.

The respondent denies the allegations and contends that the claimant was fairly dismissed because of gross misconduct in relation to statements and comments he made in February 2021. It also denies that the claimant's beliefs, as defined by him, qualify for protection under the Equality Act. ...

The unanimous judgment of the tribunal is:

1. The claimant's anti-Zionist beliefs qualified as a philosophical belief and as a protected characteristic pursuant to section 10 Equality Act 2010 at the material times.
2. The claimant succeeds in claims of direct discrimination because of his philosophical belief contrary to section 13 Equality Act 2010 in relation to:
 - a. The respondent's decision to dismiss him on 1 October 2021
 - b. The respondent's rejection of his appeal against dismissal on 23 February 2022
3. The claimant succeeds in his claim for unfair dismissal pursuant to section 98 Employment Rights Act 1996. ...

To read the full judgement see

<https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Miller-judgment-1400780.2022-JDT.pdf>

TOP

Holocaust

House of Commons Written Answer

National Holocaust Memorial Centre and Learning Service

Peter Bottomley (Conservative) [11931] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to the oral evidence hearing of the Holocaust Memorial Bill Committee on the afternoon of 24 January 2024, whether he has had discussions with his Department's Counsel on the press release issued by the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation and the Cabinet Office entitled Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects win UK Holocaust Memorial International Design Competition; for what reason his Counsel contradicted the assertion that Sir David Adjaye was the lead designer of the architecture for that memorial; and if will take steps to draw that press release to the Committee's attention.

Simon Hoare: Counsel for the Secretary of State correctly drew the Select Committee's attention to the role of the late Asa Bruno in designing the Holocaust Memorial. Mr Bruno's evidence to the planning inquiry summarised the position as follows:

"I am co-founder and Director of Ron Arad Architects Ltd, the architectural practice acting as Memorial Architect for the project, and I am leading the role of Memorial Architect on behalf of the practice."

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/11931>

The evidence hearing referred to above can be read at

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14140/html/>

TOP

House of Commons Debate

Support for Civilians Fleeing Gaza

col 222 **Peter Grant (SNP):** ... About 1.8 million people are trapped in Gaza right now. Almost all of them are multiple internal refugees, who have been forced to flee their homes elsewhere in Gaza and again several times, as places that were promised would be safe soon became anything but.

I do not want to go into the arguments about the legality or illegality, morality or immorality of what is happening there, and what has happened previously in Israel. ...

We have already seen more than 27,000 deaths in Gaza, mostly women and children. The vast majority are completely innocent civilians who have never wished any harm on anyone. There is a real and imminent danger that that horrific death toll will increase exponentially if, as still seems likely, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency is forced to stop or significantly scale down its lifesaving work in Gaza. People are already dying not just because of military action but because essential supplies of food, water and medicines are not getting through in sufficient quantities.

Drew Hendry (SNP): ... Is it not about time that the UK Government put in a scheme, even for relatives of UK citizens, to get them safe harbour away from the atrocities that they face every day?

Peter Grant: I absolutely agree ...

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... Does he agree that the most vulnerable people under attack in Gaza need a clear path to safety? Will he join me in urging the neighbouring nations also to step up their efforts to welcome refugees with open arms? ...

col 223 **Peter Grant:** ... some of the neighbouring countries are hosting between 1 million and 2 million refugees from Syria. ...

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op): ... A constituent of mine is a Palestinian international student ... His family remain in Gaza, and he is desperate for his children to join him, yet the Government have not opened up an opportunity or a scheme to bring his family to him. ...

Peter Grant: ... I think the message emerging is that this situation is affecting significant numbers of people in the United Kingdom. A large number of our constituents have close family members who are in mortal danger. ...

Lives have been lost because aid has not always got through in time, and certainly not in sufficient quantities. If UNRWA has to scale down significantly, or even stop its activities, the situation will worsen ... if we do not start to act soon, we could see more civilian deaths in Gaza than there were in Rwanda in 1994. ... Regardless of what terminology people choose to use to describe the actions of the various warring factions in and around Palestine, regardless of the terminology used to describe what is being done to innocent civilians, and regardless of who we choose to point the finger of blame at, it is not tenable to suggest that we can stand back and let today's figure of tens of thousands of preventable deaths grow into hundreds of thousands, or even more. ...

... First, where civilians in Gaza have close family members in the United Kingdom, the UK Government should, at the very least, be negotiating safe passage for them to get out of Gaza. Secondly, the Government should be guaranteeing their right to come to the United Kingdom and join their families, not necessarily permanently—that is not what Palestinians want—but as a short-term, emergency measure, to keep them safe until their homeland, the land they want to return to, is once more safe and fit for human habitation. ...

... my constituent Dr Lubna Hadoura ... came here as a student ... but she liked Scotland so much that she stayed. She has given over 30 years—her entire adult lifetime—of

service to our NHS as a consultant surgeon ...

col/ 224 She has about 20 close relatives living under bombardment in Gaza, ranging from her elderly mum to two babies too wee even to walk. Dr Hadoura loves living in Fife. Most of her family have no intention of coming to live permanently in Fife, or indeed anywhere else in the United Kingdom. They want to live their lives in Palestine; that is home for them. But most important of all, they want to live, and living is becoming almost physically impossible in Gaza. ...

We owe her ...

Joanna Cherry (SNP): ... we should have a wider humanitarian visa. In the last few months there have been nearly twice as many civilian deaths in Gaza as in Ukraine. What difference does my hon. Friend think there is between the position of the Gazans and that of the Ukrainians that is preventing the British Government from issuing a humanitarian visa?

Peter Grant: ... I refuse to accept any distinction between any two human beings who are in mortal danger. We do not expect firefighters to check bank accounts or passports before deciding who is to be taken out of a burning building. We do not expect ambulance crews to check who someone is before deciding in which order to treat casualties after a road accident, although some people do. We certainly do not expect to see the heroes who man—and woman—lifeboats stopping to check people's identities before deciding whether to pull them out of the sea. In the same way, we should not be making distinctions between those who should be allowed to live in the United Kingdom and those who should be left to die in Gaza or anywhere else ...

col/ 225 **Matt Western (Labour):** ... My constituents Rami Alfaqani and Alaa Safi have lost 52 members of their family, and another family member needs urgent medical intervention. That is why we should do the humanitarian and right thing for those people.

Peter Grant: ... the situation in Gaza has become so critically desperate that the humanitarian response is the only one that can be morally tenable for any of us. ...

I am not asking the UK Government to do anything that they cannot do. I am not asking them to do anything except what I know other countries, including some of our closest international allies, have already done for the families of their citizens to get them out of Gaza. For the Foreign Office, it is not a question of "We cannot do anything more", but a question of "We choose not to do anything more", and I think that that is an untenable position for anyone to adopt at this time. ...

One thing that is causing immeasurable upset ... to many other Palestinians in the United Kingdom is that they are in contact with Palestinian families in other countries and seeing them getting their loved ones out of Palestine. They know that the UK Government say that they cannot do anything about it, but they see other countries' Governments being able to do something. ...

col/ 226 There are no options. There is no survival plan for those families in Gaza because it is becoming impossible for anyone to survive there. An earlier Government response suggested that they should all apply for visas to travel to the United Kingdom. What a really great idea! It is impossible for them to apply for a visa in Gaza. Where are they going to apply to? Who still has a consulate operating in Gaza? If they try to travel somewhere else in Gaza to get a visa, there is a very high risk that they will be shot. If by some miracle they manage to reach the Egyptian border—remember, the only borders they have are with Israel and Egypt—the border guards will say, "Have you got a visa to travel somewhere else? No? Get back to Gaza, then." And the whole thing goes round in a circle. They cannot get a visa without getting out of Gaza, and they cannot get out of Gaza without a visa. ...

col/ 227 **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty):** ... the situation in Gaza is desperate. Innocent Palestinians are suffering terribly amid the substantial and growing humanitarian crisis.

The death toll has now topped 27,000, with more than 66,000 reported injured, mostly women and children. Fewer than half of Gaza's hospitals are even partially functional, and they lack the staff, equipment and resources they need. Meanwhile, large numbers of people are living in overcrowded shelters without the most basic amenities and are suffering unthinkable trauma from the near constant bombardment. More than 1.7 million people have fled their homes, with nearly half of Gaza's population packed into the southern region of Rafah.

... at this time we are not considering a bespoke route for Palestinians affected by the conflict. Moreover, the issue of resettling Palestinian refugees is, of course, complicated by the right of return, which we must carefully consider. That issue is at the heart of the middle east peace process. For many of those fleeing Gaza, permanent resettlement to a third country is not the right solution. Indeed, it may be the worst option for those whose dearest hope is to live out their days in a recognised state of Palestine. ...

Joanna Cherry: My hon. Friend ... was very clear that he is looking for temporary visas ... Does the Minister not think that the United Kingdom has a particular responsibility, given the history of our involvement in the region and the Balfour declaration?

Leo Docherty: We all have a responsibility. All developed nations have a responsibility to ensure that the urgent humanitarian disaster in Gaza is made less severe by our interventions. ...

Right now, it is clear that we need measures to increase the provision of humanitarian aid to help those in desperate need. The Government are therefore focused on these efforts, alongside our efforts to achieve a sustainable ceasefire. ...

col 228 We have called for a humanitarian pause and a sustainable ceasefire. ... we have trebled our aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 7 October ...

We need to see water, fuel and electricity restored. We want to see the Erez crossing open to allow direct aid to north Gaza. We want to see Ashdod port opened. We want to see unencumbered access to aid coming from Jordan. We want the Kerem Shalom crossing open seven days a week, rather than just five. We want to extend the opening hours and capacity of the Nitzana screening facility and the Kerem Shalom checkpoint so that a greater volume of aid can pass via trucks. We want to ensure that the United Nations has the people, vehicles and equipment necessary. ...

Safe and legal routes do exist ... but the way we can have a positive impact ... is for us to push for a humanitarian pause and a ceasefire. ...

Israel must take steps, working with partners, including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid. That includes allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses; opening more routes into Gaza; and restoring water, fuel and electricity.

col 229 The Foreign Secretary is directly engaging with Israeli leaders on that and has announced work alongside Qatar to get more aid into Gaza ... When he met Prime Minister Netanyahu at the end of January, he reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points ...

Peter Grant: May I take the Minister back to his comment about safe and legal routes? Nobody can cross from Gaza to Egypt unless they have documents that prove they have been given the right to enter a third country, and nobody in Gaza has any way of getting such documents. Could he just describe exactly where the safe and legal route is and how Gazans are supposed to get there?

Leo Docherty: The only way that anyone will be able to come to safety is if there is a humanitarian pause and a sustainable ceasefire. So Ministers making statements about how many people we may or may not take would be rhetorically impressive but practically meaningless. We are therefore focused on the purposeful work and serious diplomacy of pushing for a humanitarian pause and then a sustainable ceasefire. ...

col 230 We are also working to turn what would be a fragile truce into a sustainable, permanent ceasefire without a return to more fighting. That means giving Israel the

reassurance that it needs to end its campaign. This means the Hamas leaders must leave Gaza and the attacks against Israel must end. All Israeli hostages must be released and a new Palestinian Government formed that can deliver for all its citizens, accompanied by an international support package. It also means giving the people of Gaza and the west bank the political perspective of a Palestinian state and a new future.

Turning to reconstruction efforts, while the long-term future of a Palestinian state is important for a lasting peace, there is the immediate task of rebuilding Gaza. We should be in no doubt that reconstruction will be a daunting task. It will take a giant international effort because of the scale of destruction, and it is beyond the means of any one country ...

Our commitment is beyond doubt, both in resource and diplomatic effort. ...

Our immediate focus is on getting more aid in and securing an immediate pause in the fighting. That is how those affected will have their lives improved. We must do all we can to generate momentum to build a permanent peace and rebuild Gaza. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-06/debates/BCCBAE48-CBEC-4A17-964C-66B2A16CCD72/SupportForCiviliansFleeingGaza>

House of Commons Ministerial Statement and Q&A

Situation in the Red Sea

col 21 The Secretary of State for Defence (Grant Shapps): ... Freedom of navigation has been a cornerstone of civilisation since time immemorial. It underpins our prosperity and security, and is a founding principle of the international rules-based system. Since 19 October, the Houthis, supplied and aided by Iran, have been infringing on those fundamental freedoms by attacking international commercial vessels in the Red sea and in the Gulf of Aden. ...

The UK has always stood up for the rules-based international order, and since the Houthis began their illegal attacks we have been at the forefront of the international response, whether helping to defend vessels in the vicinity ... or working in tandem with the US and other allies to tackle the Houthis, always in response to specific threats and always in line with international law and the principle of self-defence. ...

The Houthis believe that they are the region's Robin Hood, but as I discussed with the Yemeni Defence Minister just yesterday when I saw him in Saudi, the only people they are robbing are innocent Yemini's whose food and aid arrives via the Red sea. ...

col 22 Military action can only be one element in our efforts to confront these global challenges, and military action is indeed the very last resort. ... Our approach is therefore founded on four pillars. First, we are increasing diplomatic engagement. The Foreign Secretary travelled to the region and met his Iranian counterpart last month to make it clear that Iran must cease supplying the Houthis with weapons and intelligence and use its influence to stop the Houthi attacks. ...

Secondly, we must end the illegal flow of arms to the Houthis. ... Thirdly, we must cut off the Houthis' financial resources. ...

Fourthly, we continue to help the people of Yemen, delivering humanitarian aid and supporting a negotiated peace. ...

col 23 Placating the sponsors of terror does not benefit our international order in the long run, or bring peace to the middle east or elsewhere in Europe or the world. The truth is that we cannot ignore the importance of these great waterways for shipping. That is the reason the world backs the United Nations convention on the law of the sea. ... If we do not deal with these threats, every nation will be poorer. ...

John Healey (Labour): ... We back the UK-US airstrikes that took place at the weekend to protect shipping in the Red sea. We know that the strikes were carried out against Houthi command centres and weapons stores. We accept that they were limited, necessary and

targeted to minimise the risk of civilian casualties. The Houthis are attacking the ships of many nations, threatening maritime security and international trade, and putting civilian and military lives in serious danger. ...

We accept that the strikes we justified, but will the Defence Secretary confirm that they were also effective? ... Ministers have said that the aims of the strikes are, first, to deter Houthi attacks, and secondly, to degrade their capabilities. The first aim has not yet succeeded, as Houthi attacks continue, but is the fact that those attacks are now less sophisticated and more sporadic a sign that the second aim may be succeeding? ...

We also back the leading role of the Royal Navy in the continuing defence of shipping from all nations in the Red sea. ...

col 24 Finally, like the Defence Secretary, I totally reject the Houthi claims that firing missiles and drones at ships from around the world is somehow linked to the conflict in Gaza. They have been attacking oil tankers and seizing ships for at least five years—not just for the 121 days since 7 October. Those attacks do absolutely nothing for the Palestinian people, whose agonies are now extreme. We want the Gaza fighting to stop now with a humanitarian truce that can build into a sustainable ceasefire, to stop the killing of innocent civilians, get all the remaining hostages out and get much more aid into Gaza. The UK aid efforts must be accelerated. Have any more RAF flights taken off since the Defence Secretary was last in this Chamber, and if not, why not?

Finally, for long-term peace, there has to be a political process that can turn the rhetoric around two states living side by side in peace into reality. The House is united in that UK vision, and I give this commitment from our side: if elected to form the next Government, Labour will lead this new push for peace.

Grant Shapps: ... Were the actions effective? Yes, they hit the targets. Were all the targets hit? Again, yes. We are still carrying out surveillance to find out the exact impact, but I think we can be very confident that all the relevant objectives were reached. ...

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether the action was successful, and rightly pointed out that what we are seeing is rather more sporadic ...

col 25 We utterly reject any notion that these continued attacks by the Houthis are anything to do with the situation in Gaza. The Houthis are opportunist pirates who are using a situation to their benefit: a few years ago, they did not even support Hamas, but suddenly they want to be their greatest champions. They are over 2,000 kilometres away from Gaza; they are simply using the situation to their advantage, and it is wise for the House to not over-link the two. None the less, the right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to about the need to see a humanitarian truce and a sustainable ceasefire—that is the Government's policy. We are working extremely hard to try to achieve that ...

The issue is not getting the aid to location—I have been working very closely with the Cypriot Government, for example, on how we can increase the amount of aid. The single biggest problem remains getting the aid into the country. We had some success with getting Kerem Shalom open, but what we really need to see is Ashdod open, in order to route that aid to Kerem Shalom and straight into Gaza. The Government and I will continue to push for that route, but the problem is not the flights taking off; it is the aid getting in. ...

Julian Lewis (Conservative): Do the Government accept that it is difficult to deter terrorist fanatics, and that one mainly has to contain the effectiveness of what they do until they are ultimately destroyed, preferably by our regional allies? Does the Secretary of State feel that there is in fact a link to a separate conflict, and that is the conflict in Ukraine? ...

Grant Shapps: As ever, my right hon. Friend has absolutely hit the nail on the head. Russia and Iran are working together. Actually, the same kind of drones—sometimes the Shahed drones—that are being fired in Ukraine by the Russians, courtesy of Iran, are also being fired by the Houthis. ...

col 26 Dave Doogan (SNP): The people of Scotland and elsewhere on these islands deserve to know what the plan is for this crisis in the Red sea—not the timings, the detail of missions, the tactical ambition or the resources behind these, but the broad strategy being pursued with lethal force in our name and in the absence of parliamentary approval. ...

We see the toll that Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has taken on our constituents and businesses over energy costs, so we cannot allow this to be compounded further by interrupting global supply chains, nor can we ever tolerate or stand idly by while seafarers are put at risk ...

In closing, this is not about supporting Gazans, or people dying or fleeing persecution in Gaza, but about the Houthis pursuing their own aims. However, I would be interested to know what the Government's assessment is of the uptick in temperature in the middle east—in Gaza, in Yemen and with NATO ally personnel being killed.

Grant Shapps: ... it cannot be right that international shipping is prevented from its own freedom of navigation. ... I think it is quite clear that there is a strong support in this House. It is also important that there is sufficient freedom of action to ensure the safety and security of our airmen and women when they undertake these actions, rather than flagging them substantially in advance. ...

col 27 Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat): I wonder whether the Secretary of State has seen the front page of the *Financial Times* today because it outlines how Iran has been using Lloyds and Santander accounts to evade sanctions. The US is accusing front companies of funding the IRGC with hundreds of millions of dollars and working with Russian intelligence to raise money for Iranian proxies. ... Does that not yet again show that we must proscribe the IRGC now?

Grant Shapps: ... we do not routinely comment on proscription. It is the case however that we do sanction, and we have sanctioned the entirety of the IRGC already, as well as taken a number of different actions. ...

col 28 Mark Pritchard (Conservative): ... we do not want to see an escalation in the region and ... we want to be proportionate in our response and calibrate our response not to provoke and antagonise, but is it not the case that we might actually be hitting the wrong target—that we are hitting proxies of Iran and, while I believe in peace and diplomacy, the malevolent factor in the region, in all of this, is Iran? It might be the case that, while we have the best of diplomatic intentions and we do not want to provoke Iran to a major conflict with NATO, the US or the UK, putting off that decision now will cost more lives in the future. Iran and the regime—not the Iranian people but the regime in Iran—are behind all this. ...

Grant Shapps: My right hon. Friend makes the excellent point that Iran is behind all this. Iran is behind Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and the IRGC-aligned militia that we have seen attack not just American troops—I often hear it is American personnel have been attacked 160 separate times in Syria and Iraq, but in fact about a third of those occasions involved British troops as well. On every occasion, Iran is behind all of this. ...

John McDonnell (Labour): Let me first make the point that a direct attack on Iran would be insanity; the region would be provoked and others would be dragged into it. I understand why the Government are saying that it is wise “to not over-link” Houthi strikes with Gaza, but the reality is that the middle east region is on the edge of conflagration as a result of the war that is going on and the attacks on Gaza. The priority must therefore be to secure peace in Gaza. We have a limited role in that, but we know that Netanyahu would secure peace if pressurised to do so by the American Government, because realistically they are the only power that can influence him and Israeli strategy. What further talks have taken place with the Biden Government to ensure that they exercise the maximum pressure on Netanyahu to get to that peace negotiating table?

Grant Shapps: ... the UK and the US work very closely on this. ... last week. I met Blinken, Lloyd Austin and others to discuss exactly the points that the right hon.

Gentleman raises about how we bring together a solution that not only provides, ultimately, the Palestinian state for the Palestinian people, but security guarantees for Israel. It is also important to realise that we are working closely in a number of different spheres, including on the Lebanese border, where we are working hard to try to prevent a further conflict there. We should remember that 125,000 Israelis have had to move from that border because of the activity of Lebanese Hezbollah. We are working with the Lebanese Government. ...

col 29 Ben Bradshaw (Labour): Will the Secretary of State please have another go at giving a better answer to the question from the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) about the extremely serious report in today's *Financial Times* that two of Britain's main banks are indirectly helping to fund the Houthis, with whom we are now in some sort of conflict?

Grant Shapps: ... I know that he wants me to go into further detail, but I am unable to do that at the Dispatch Box right now. We have noted both the question and the article of this morning. We are also intensely engaged in finding the best way to ensure that Iranian influence, whether through the UK or in the region, is limited. ...

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): The Houthi rebels are violent extremist antisemites, and it is right that we take action to combat their aggression in the Red sea. ... Is the Secretary of State confident that we will get to the point where we can stop the attacks altogether?

Grant Shapps: I think the clock is running down for the Houthis, in as much as their ability is being degraded ... they are more reliant still on Iran ...

col 31 Tom Hunt (Conservative): ... The irony of the Iranian regime accusing us of destabilising the region through our actions will not be lost on reasonable people. Does the Secretary of State agree that those demonstrators on the streets of London applauding what the Houthi rebels have been doing are at best useful idiots and at worst truly the enemy within?

Grant Shapps: I use my own language, but it is disgraceful to see people go out and support those who are indiscriminately firing at merchant ships—that is absolutely appalling. ...

Andy Slaughter (Labour): The Secretary of State is rightly clear about breaches of international law by the Houthis in the Red sea. Can he be equally clear about breaches of international law by all sides in Gaza? ...

Grant Shapps: The United Kingdom Government always want international humanitarian law to be adhered to, and we make that point repeatedly to every side in this conflict. I think the hon. Gentleman is driving at Israel. To answer his question directly, Israel is included. Hamas could end the conflict very quickly if they release the hostages that they have kidnapped and cease firing on Israel. ...

Andrew Percy (Conservative): ... as well as open support for the Houthis this weekend on the streets of central London, some protestors in the pro-Palestinian marches again called for an intifada and held up deeply racist antisemitic signs, one of which included informing Israelis—we presume Jewish Israelis—that they were indigenous to nowhere other than hell. I am not sure that it is just ignorance; I think something more sinister is at play among some of the protestors. We should call it what it is: pure and simple Jew hate. Will the Secretary of State inform the House whether he has spoken to anyone else across Government about more action to deal with some of the hate on our streets?

Grant Shapps: The Home Secretary continuously keeps this matter under review, and meets police chiefs to ensure that they have the powers to combat what my hon. Friend rightly describes as absolutely disgusting behaviour, which has no place at all on our streets. I am sure that the whole House needs no reminding, but perhaps the people who go out campaigning do: the Houthis' slogan is "Death to America, death to Israel, death to the Jews no matter where they are." There is no place for that on the streets of Britain.

col 32 Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): It is an extraordinary situation where the Secretary

of State comes here, makes a matter-of-fact statement about the launch of missiles against a number of targets and countries, gives no indication of the long-term war aim by the UK at present, and says absolutely nothing about the crying, desperate need for a ceasefire to protect the people of Gaza from further death and destruction. Does he not realise that the extension of the conflict by Britain and the United States to at least four other countries risks a huge conflagration across the whole region? ...

Grant Shapps: Never have I disagreed so much with the right hon. Gentleman ... The statement is on the Red sea. I am surprised that he is not more appreciative of the geography. The attacks in the Red sea are a very long way from Gaza. He misunderstands why I have come to this House: to talk about munitions on a single country, not three countries, as he said. ...

col 33 **Rehman Chishti (Conservative):** The Defence Secretary has said the Government are looking at a comprehensive strategy with a four-pronged approach to degrade the Houthis. We have classified the actions of the Houthis as terrorist and said that they pose a significant threat to British interests. I then look at the “Proscribed Terrorist Organisations” document from the House of Commons Library, which lists non-state actors Ansar Al Islam, Al Ittihad Al Islamia and Hezbollah, all of which meet the criteria for proscription, yet the Houthis are not proscribed as a terrorist organisation. The Secretary of State says that we have sanctioned some high-level individuals. The US has proscribed them; we have not.

My question to the Defence Secretary is this: will the UK set up a contact group to deal with non-state actors in the long term? This threat is not going to go away. The Houthis will splinter into other terrorist organisations in the region.

Grant Shapps: ... we have made sure that a number of individuals ... have effectively been dealt with. The wider question is getting the balance right between ensuring that food aid can still reach Yemen—that was the discussion I was having with the Yemeni Government yesterday—and full proscription. We need to make sure we get that balance right ...

col 34 **Kenny MacAskill (Alba):** It is not simply the Houthis who say that this issue is inextricably linked to Gaza; the embassy of Yemen has made that clear in paragraph 4 of its letter to all MPs, and Brigadier Deverell, the former British military attaché in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, has said that it is linked. He has gone on to add that these strikes will fail and will not resolve the situation. So rather than lurching towards world war three, and rather than an escalation of the conflict, widening it beyond countries and this limited territory, is it not time to ensure that Israel is called to heel, that its genocide ceases and that we get an immediate ceasefire? ...

col 35 **Grant Shapps:** ... There is a difference between this absolutely not being inextricably linked to Gaza, apart from when Opposition Members might try to link it, and the Houthis claiming that it is somehow linked as a badge of convenience—as a way of trying to muscle in on that action. ...

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op): The Defence Secretary was right to highlight the risk to humanitarian aid in the region, not least given the catastrophic situation in Gaza. What steps has he deployed over the last four months, through air capability as well as sea capability, to establish routes for aid to reach Gaza by sea or by air?

Grant Shapps: I would link that with the action we have been taking to degrade the Houthis’ ability to prevent aid from reaching people. ... the Yemenis obtain almost all their food via the Red sea, so I would class all the action that we have taken, in three rounds of strikes, as very much part of getting that food into the country. ...

col 36 **Jim Shannon (DUP):** ... Does the Secretary of State agree that the fact that pro-Hamas Houthi sites are celebrating the effect that the strikes in the Red sea are having on food and other supply chains sends a signal that the words spoken and actions taken by this country—our Government—and our allies are not yet having the desired effect? What steps will the Secretary of State and our allies take not simply to prevent trade route

difficulties from escalating already eye-watering prices, but to send the clear message that we in the United Kingdom are not afraid to use our strength and our intelligence to respond adequately and, if necessary, even more strongly?

Grant Shapps: The hon. Gentleman has made a very worthwhile point. It is clear that the Houthis, while perhaps no longer able to act as they once did, are not fully degraded. There must surely come a time when they understand that this is no longer in their interests, because we are working actively to intercept new supplies as far as possible and they will continue to be degraded if they continue to act as they have in respect of commercial shipping and, of course, the Royal Navy. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-05/debates/10FE495A-93BA-4EED-814A-22BA1CC26717/SituationInTheRedSea>

The Financial Times article referred to above can be read at

<https://www.ft.com/content/aac08cf4-a6f2-4e39-995f-23f7fa5ea5ea>

House of Commons Written Answers

Asylum: Gaza

Anne McLaughlin (SNP) [12563] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his Department's policies on deciding asylum applications of the conflict in Gaza.

Tom Pursglove: Asylum claims made by claimants from Gaza, as is the case with all asylum claims lodged in the UK and admitted to the UK asylum system, have an individual assessment made against the background of relevant case law, policy guidance and the latest available country of origin information.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12563>

Israel: Air Force

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [12729] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Israeli Air Force operated planes have (a) landed and (b) taken off from British territory since 7 October 2023.

James Heapey: Nine Israeli Air Force operated planes have taken off and landed from British territory since 7 October. These figures are based on official requests for diplomatic flight clearance that have been submitted by the Israeli Embassy in London, subsequently cleared by Ministry of Defence.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12729>

USA: Military Bases

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [12731] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the US Air Force has used any Royal Air Force bases in the UK to transfer weapons to Israel since 7 October 2023.

James Heapey: The Ministry of Defence does not comment on Allies' operations.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12731>

Israel: Air Force

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [12732] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Royal Air Force operated planes have flown to Israel since 7 October 2023.

James Heapey: As of 2 February 2024, a total of 48 RAF operated aircraft have flown to Israel since 7 October 2023. These flights included aircraft used to transport Ministers and senior officials conducting diplomatic engagements with Israel.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12732>

Gaza: Surveillance

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [12733] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many surveillance flights has the Royal Air Force flown over Gaza since 7 October 2023.

James Heapey: The UK has deployed surveillance assets to improve our situational awareness in the region and provide assurance to our partners. For operational security reasons, I cannot comment on the specifics of this activity.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12733>

Gaza: Israel

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [12735] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether intelligence on military operations has been shared with Israel during the conflict in Gaza.

James Heapey: Yes, I refer you to my written ministerial statement to Parliament on 5 December 2023, on the sharing of intelligence from UK Military Operations.

[Update on the situation in Israel and Gaza](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12735)

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12735>

Israel: Palestinians

Mark Hendrick (Labour Co-op) [11961] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his counterpart in Israel on the potential merits of creating a two-state solution with Palestine.

Andrew Mitchell: We want to see an end to the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible and are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life. These are the vital steps:

- A political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.
- The formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package.
- Removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel.
- The release of all Israeli hostages.
- Hamas no longer in charge of Gaza.

The Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have reiterated these messages in their contacts with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior Israeli political leaders, including during the Foreign Secretary's visit to Israel on 24 January.

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/2024-01-30/11961>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Israel: Palestinians

Daisy Cooper (Liberal Democrat) [10931] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made representations to his Israeli counterpart on the remarks by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 20 January 2024 relating to his position on the creation of a Palestinian state.

Paula Barker (Labour) [11225] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his Department's policies of the Israeli government's policy on a two-state solution.

Andrew Mitchell: We support a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people; Gaza is Occupied Palestinian Territory and will be part of a future Palestinian state, and the Palestinian Authority has an important long-term role to play. We must work with our allies to provide serious, practical and enduring support needed to bolster the Palestinian Authority. We want to see an end to the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible and are calling

for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

There are five vital steps:

- A political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.
- The formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package.
- Removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel.
- The release of all Israeli hostages.
- Hamas no longer in charge of Gaza.

The Foreign Secretary has reiterated these messages with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior Israeli political leaders, including during his visit to Israel on 24 January.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-22/10931>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-23/11225>

Binyamin Netanyahu's remarks referred to above can be read at

<https://twitter.com/netanyahu/status/1748764135716749568>

Gaza: Genocide

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [11631] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the International Court of Justice's decision on the request for provisional measures in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip, whether he plans to call for an immediate ceasefire.

Andrew Mitchell: We want to see an end to the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible. We are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, and then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life. The vital steps to achieve this are:

- a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution
- the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package
- removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel
- the release of all Israeli hostages
- Hamas being no longer in charge of Gaza.

The Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have reiterated these messages in their contacts with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior Israeli political leaders, including during the Foreign Secretary's visit to Israel on 24 January.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/11631>

The International Court of Justice decision (Order) referred to above can be read at

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

Gaza: Israel

Yasmin Qureshi (Labour) [11744] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he is taking steps to help ensure that the Israeli government is implementing the International Court of Justice's decision on the request for provisional measures in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

Leo Docherty: We respect the role and independence of the International Court of

Justice (ICJ). However, we have stated that we have considerable concerns about this case, which is not helpful in the goal of achieving a sustainable ceasefire. Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas in line with International Humanitarian Law, as we have said from the outset. Our view is that Israel's actions in Gaza cannot be described as a genocide, which is why we thought South Africa's decision to bring the case was wrong and provocative. We have long advocated for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid. We are clear that an immediate pause is necessary to get aid in and hostages out, and then we want to build towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to the fighting.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-29/11744>

The International Court of Justice decision (Order) referred to above can be read at

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Genocide

Rachel Hopkins (Labour) [12463] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with his (a) Israeli counterpart and (b) the UK's international allies on the provisional measures set forth by the International Court of Justice in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

Rachel Hopkins (Labour) [12492] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure implementation in full of the International Court of Justice's Order relating to the case of the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v Israel), published on 26 January 2024.

Reply from Andrew Mitchell: The FCDO has welcomed the Court's call for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza.

We are clear that an immediate pause is necessary to get aid in and hostages out, and then we want to build towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to the fighting.

We respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). However, we have also stated that we have considerable concerns about this case. Our view is that Israel's actions in Gaza cannot be described as a genocide, which is why we thought South Africa's decision to bring the case was wrong and provocative.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12463>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12492>

The International Court of Justice provisional measures (Order) referred to above can be read at

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Genocide

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [11629] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the International Court of Justice's decision on the request for provisional measures in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [11630] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he plans to change his approach to (a)

the Israeli Government and (b) the UN General Assembly and Security Council as a result of the International Court of Justice's decision on the request for provisional measures in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip.

Andrew Mitchell: We respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). However, we have stated that we have considerable concerns about this case, which is not helpful in the goal of achieving a sustainable ceasefire. Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas in line with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), as we have said from the outset. Our view is that Israel's actions in Gaza cannot be described as a genocide, which is why we thought South Africa's decision to bring the case was wrong and provocative. We welcome the Court's call for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza. We are clear that an immediate pause is necessary to get aid in and hostages out, and then we want to build towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to the fighting.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/11629>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/11630>

The International Court of Justice decision (Order) referred to above can be read at

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

Gaza: Genocide

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat) [12335] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has made an assessment of the consistency of (a) the decision to pause future funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and (b) paragraph 86(4) of the International Court of Justice's Order relating to the case of the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v Israel), published on 26 January 2024.

Leo Docherty: We are appalled by allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. The UK is pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations.

However, we remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, and our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands, and we are getting on with aid delivery through funding multiple implementing partners including other UN agencies and international and UK NGOs. This support is helping people in Gaza get food, water, shelter and medicines.

We are also clear that an immediate pause is necessary to get aid in and hostages out, and then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12335>

The International Court of Justice Order referred to above can be read at

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

UNRWA: Finance

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat) [12336] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the Oral Statement of the Minister of State of 29 January 2024, on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories,

Official Report, columns 620-622, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the temporary pause in funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), announced on 27 January 2024, on Palestinian refugees in (a) Jordan, (b) Lebanon, (c) Syria, (d) East Jerusalem, (e) West Bank and (f) Gaza.

Leo Docherty: We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the those who desperately need it, and our decision to pause future funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response, whether in Gaza or the wider region. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands, and we are getting on with aid delivery to the region through funding multiple implementing partners including other UN agencies and international and UK NGOs. This support is helping people get food, water, shelter and medicines. The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza. We will continue to support and have supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. 750 tonnes of life-saving food aid arrived in the first delivery and 315 tonnes in the second delivery.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12336>

The Statement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-29/debates/08A4F56A-BA86-4A9B-BAF8-854C100E498B/IsraelAndTheOccupiedPalestinianTerritories>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-allegations-about-unrwa-staff-and-7-october-attacks>

UNRWA: Finance

Chris Law (SNP) [11805] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether representations were made to the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs on the UK's funding of UNRWA in meetings with Israeli government officials during his most recent visit to that country.

Leo Docherty: The UK is appalled by allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. The UK is temporarily pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations. We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-29/11805>

UNRWA: Finance

Rachel Hopkins (Labour) [12464] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department forecasted aid funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees for the financial year 2024-25.

Andrew Mitchell: We are appalled by allegations that United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. As we have said, we are pausing any future funding of UNRWA, whilst we review these concerning allegations. The pause will remain in place until we review the allegations, and any future funding decisions will be taken after this point. We are looking to our partners in the UN to carry out a robust and comprehensive

investigation.

We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to people in Gaza who desperately need it.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12464>

UNRWA: Finance

Tommy Sheppard (SNP) [12418] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Andrew Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary is in close contact with senior Israeli political leaders regarding the wider humanitarian situation in Gaza; he discussed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 24 January. The UK is appalled by allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned, and announced on 27 January its pause to any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations. We are looking to our partners in the UN to carry out a robust and comprehensive investigation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12418>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-allegations-about-unrwa-staff-and-7-october-attacks>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [11633] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the International Court of Justice's decision on the request for provisional measures in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), what steps he is taking to accelerate the delivery of aid into Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza. The Foreign Secretary discussed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation there with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 24 January. He reiterated the need for Israel to open more crossing points into Gaza, for Nitzana and Kerem Shalom to be open for longer, and for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively across the whole of Gaza. An immediate pause is now necessary to get aid in and hostages out.

Israel must take steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza including allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses, opening more routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity.

We have trebled our aid commitment for this financial year and are working closely with partners in international agencies and in the region to increase access. The Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Mark Bryson-Richardson, is based in the region and is working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/11633>

The International Court of Justice decision (Order) referred to above can be read at

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Rachel Hopkins (Labour) [12490] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department forecasted aid funding for agencies supporting people in Palestine for the financial year 2024-2025.

Andrew Mitchell: We trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings. The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

We will continue to support and have supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. 750 tonnes of life-saving food aid arrived in the first delivery and 315 tonnes in the second delivery.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12490>

Hammas: Finance

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [11771] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what mechanisms are in place to disrupt Hammas' financial networks.

Leo Docherty: The UK, along with our G7 partners, is committed to taking action to deny Hammas the ability to raise and use funds to carry out atrocities. Hammas is a proscribed organisation under the Terrorism Act 2000, meaning it is a criminal offence in the UK to provide money or other property to the group. Since the 7 October attacks on Israel, the UK has also designated 19 individuals and entities in the senior leadership and financial networks of Hammas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), in close coordination with the US. This adds to the existing sanctions on Hammas and PIJ in their entirety. We have also used our new Iran sanctions powers to target Iranian financial support for Hammas. As the Foreign Secretary has said, our sanctions send a clear message that the UK is committed to ensuring there is no hiding place for those financing terrorist activities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-29/11771>

Gaza: Charities

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [12440] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which properties of UK charities in Gaza have been hit by Israeli military strikes.

Andrew Mitchell: We are aware of the air strike that hit the residential compound housing the International Red Cross (IRC) and Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) Emergency Medical Team (EMT). Israel has a right to defend itself against Hammas, but it must comply with International Humanitarian Law (IHL); including the protection of hospitals, civilians, and medical staff. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12440>

Gaza: Armed Conflict

Lisa Nandy (Labour) [12333] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has raised with his Israeli counterpart the reported airstrike on the Medical Aid for Palestine and International Red Cross compound in Al Muwasi on 18 January 2023.

Andrew Mitchell: Israel has a right to defend itself against Hammas, but it must comply with International Humanitarian Law (IHL); including the protection of hospitals, civilians, and medical staff. We want to see Israel take greater care to

limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians. The Prime Minister has made this clear to Prime Minister Netanyahu. The Foreign Secretary also raised this with Prime Minister Netanyahu, including the airstrike affecting the Medical Aid for Palestinian (MAP) and International Red Cross (IRC) compound and team.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/12333>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [12071] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure aid continues to reach Gaza, following the suspension of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK is appalled by allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. The UK is pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations.

However, we remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, and our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands, and we are getting on with aid delivery through funding multiple implementing partners including other UN agencies and international and UK NGOs. This support is helping people in Gaza get food, water, shelter and medicines. The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/12071>

Gaza: Telecommunications

Anne McLaughlin (SNP) [12564] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has had discussions with cellular network providers in Gaza on the adequacy of telecommunication services in that region.

Leo Docherty: We are deeply concerned about the severely damaged telecommunications and internet networks in Gaza, which are causing repeated near total communications blackouts. This is limiting the ability of Palestinians in Gaza to communicate and greatly hampers the humanitarian response. Officials are in regular contact with Paltel, the leading telecommunications company in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). We recognise the strenuous efforts of Paltel's staff in Gaza to make repairs and maintain services, at great risk to themselves. The Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the OPTs is working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching and being delivered across Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12564>

Gaza: Children

Dan Carden (Labour) [10885] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will take steps to help ensure access to education for children in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK is a founding member and key donor to Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. ECW is supporting education preparedness work in Gaza. We continue to support the wider delivery of education in Gaza, including through NGOs, UN

partners, the World Bank, and the Global Partnership for Education.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-22/10885>

Gaza: Children

Dan Carden (Labour) [10886] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will take steps to help provide targeted psychosocial support for children in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: We are supporting NGO partners to mobilize and deploy Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) teams and volunteers across the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. We are also supporting UNICEF to help children, adolescents and caregivers affected by the conflict with emergency and child protection services, including MHPSS.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-22/10886>

Israel: Hezbollah

Nicola Richards (Conservative) [11664] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what information his Department holds on the alleged construction of cross-border tunnels into Israel by Hezbollah.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK has repeatedly condemned Hizballah's destabilising activity in the region, including the construction of tunnels and the stockpiling of weapons, in breach of UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701. Such activity presents a threat to the security of both Israel and Lebanon and risks an escalation that is in nobody's interests.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-26/11664>

UNSCR 1559, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1559\(2004\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1559(2004))

UNSCR 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 Lords Oral Answer

Royal Navy: Drone Attacks in the Red Sea

Baroness Altmann (Conservative): My Lords, given that there have been protests on our streets supporting the Yemeni attacks, and given that the Houthi's slogans include "Death to America", "Death to Israel" and "Victory to Islam", why are the Houthis not designated as a terrorist group, given that these acts are clearly acts of terrorism? Are the Government not trying to proscribe the Houthis and their backers in Iran, the IRGC, to help stop these kinds of protests, which are supporting such terrorist actions?

The Earl of Minto: My Lords, this question is raised fairly regularly, and of course it is something which is under constant consideration. These are difficult decisions to take. However, in the meantime, we will continue to take action that is necessary, limited, legal—it is very important that it is legal—and proportionate in terms of self-defence and freedom of navigation, and indeed protecting lives.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-05/debates/C8E9A42B-B4E9-4DB0-A3CD-D13F418F3643/RoyalNavyDroneAttacksInTheRedSea#contribution-F46FD869-913E-461C-82EF-C101CF8F76C0>

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee

The UK's engagement with the Middle East and North Africa

... **Q192 Chair (Alicia Kearns, Conservative):** ... we have seen a lot of, shall we say, desire in western media to paint the Houthis as some kind of rebel movement whose cause is the Palestinian people, who support the Yemeni people, and who are rising up out of an altruistic desire to stand by their brothers and sisters in Gaza. ...

Dr Elisabeth Kendall (Mistress, Girton College, University of Cambridge, and former Senior Research Fellow in Arabic and Islamic Studies, Pembroke College, University of Oxford): The Houthis are a group that is, at once, political, military and religious. They emerged in the 1980s as a reaction to what they perceived, probably correctly, as their marginalisation economically and religiously. There was a lot of missionary activity by Salafi groups in their areas, and they wanted to push back against that.

They are probably not accurate when they say that their main motivator is standing up for the Palestinians, although this is a useful hook for them. ...

... the Houthis turned into a much more militant group from 2004, when they launched six wars between 2004 and 2010 against the Yemeni Government. ...

They are highly militant. Their politics is related to their religion. Their political arm is called Ansar Allah—Partisans of God—and there is an increasing religiosity within the movement to the extent that their leader, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, the brother of their slain leader, Hussein al-Houthi, who was killed in 2004, now speaks as though he is the word of God.

Q193 ... Helen Lackner (former Visiting Fellow, European Council for Foreign Relations, and former Research Associate, SOAS): ... they control about two-thirds of the country's population, and only about one-third of the area, so it is the most populated areas that they control. Their control is extremely firm. They rule with an iron fist. ...

Q194 Farea Al-Muslimi (Research Fellow, MENA Programme, Chatham House): Not just the UK's but the entire West's diplomacy toward the Houthis has been not to recognise them, but, in a way, to normalise with them, which is more dangerous. The way that the West understands diplomacy is as this feudal system of hierarchy, with one feeding into the other, and recognition goes within that. For the Houthis, what happened is that no one recognised them, but everyone submitted, for example, to the UK's and others' aid systems in areas under their control. ...

Q198 Royston Smith (Conservative): We planned and embarked on this Middle East and north Africa inquiry prior to 7 October and the events that followed. We now have the issue with the Houthis and the Red Sea. ... are the UK's airstrikes on Houthi targets compatible with the UK's UN penholder status for Yemen?

Helen Lackner: No ... The airstrikes are incredibly counterproductive from every possible point of view ...

I disagree with Elisabeth because their support for Palestinians in Israel is a genuine ideological position; it is probably their only really genuine one. The impact of that has been to improve their popularity by a million per cent. Their popularity has risen—not only in Yemen, but in the streets of London, where, six months ago, people did not even know what a Houthi might conceivably be, whether a human being or a thing. I am not sure that that is so important for them, but what is important for them is the support that they are getting internally, which means that people are forgetting about their mismanagement, the extortion and many of the things that they would remember otherwise. ...

The Houthis and the Saudis were possibly on the verge of agreement. ...The Saudis cannot officially and publicly state that they are against something that is supporting Palestine against Israel. Whatever their views might be, they cannot do so in public, so they have been calling for restraint in response to the airstrikes. That is another negative impact of the airstrikes.

A third impact, of course, is likely to be on the humanitarian situation, if the port of Hodeidah ceases to function. This massive amount of imports of basic foods will be interrupted and will make the situation much worse for the population. ...

Q199 Dr Kendall: ... I just want to clarify something. I do not think that the Houthis are not being genuine when they support Palestine. They are being opportunistic, however, in harnessing events in Gaza to their own effect. ...

Farea Al-Muslimi: ... A big part of UK and US power in the Middle East was mostly one of perception. A lot of things have happened that destroyed that perception. The war in Gaza is not only the most recent one but the most brutal. I understand that not many people agree with me, but I genuinely think that, if anything in Gaza happens, the Houthis might stop attacks in the Red Sea. They are genuine about that, first and foremost for their own ideological reasons. ...

Q200 Bob Seely (Conservative): ... why is the shooting into the Red Sea happening now? Is it because the Iranians are saying to the Houthis, "We would be really grateful if you could kick off now" or is this an internal Houthi dynamic, because they were becoming unpopular at home?

Helen Lackner: I believe that they are genuinely doing this in support of the Palestinians. I do not think that they are being pushed by the Iranians.

Dr Kendall: I think they have genuine empathy and sympathy with the Palestinians, but they also know that, in the region more broadly, they might not generate the kind of opposition that they would otherwise have, because there are many powers and states around the Arab and Muslim world that feel similarly that there is nothing they can do to support Palestine that puts pressure on it. This is a useful proxy for many states. ...

Q206 Helen Lackner: ... there is a very simple answer, but nobody is going to take it. End the war in Gaza, and the Houthis will stop.

Q207 Chair: ... I do not think that anyone in Parliament genuinely believes that if the war in Gaza ends, the Houthis will stop waging chaos. ... Are we really saying that the Houthis will put down their weapons and will not disrupt and try to tax boats going through because there is no longer a war in Gaza?

Dr Kendall: I think that is right. I do not think that there is a direct connection, but it might remove the moral high ground that they have managed to secure for themselves. Therefore, it would certainly help to undermine them.

Q209 Farea Al-Muslimi: ... You might not believe that the Houthis will stop because of Gaza, but their math is extremely different from yours and mine. Two plus two in the Houthi world can be equal to 10. It can be minus five. ...

Q212 Dr Kendall: ... What is more interesting is a new surge on the international front from the al-Malahem insignia of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. We had a video that revived a magazine called *Inspire*, which came out just before Christmas and was about taking this Yemeni brand of terrorism and using it as revenge for what is happening in Gaza. It was 46 minutes long and included some fairly robust instructions on airliner plots and how to make bombs. It was very much targeted at four constituents—number one against America, number two against the UK, number three against France, and number four against the EU. This is not a time to take our eye off the ball. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14216/html/>

UK Parliament House of Commons Petition

Ceasefire and the state of Palestine

David Linden (SNP) [P002911] Last month I was honoured to join worshippers for Friday

prayers at Hillview Islamic centre in Shettleston, who expressed their horror at the humanitarian crisis that sadly is unfolding in Gaza. I stand in solidarity with their calling on the Government to call a ceasefire now. The petitioners therefore request “that the House of Commons urges the Government to join with others in the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, and to call on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[To the House of Commons. The Petition of residents of the constituency of Glasgow East, Declares that the attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7th October 2023 were acts of terror, and unequivocally condemns the taking of hostages and the loss of innocent lives in those attacks; further that the petitioners condemn the disproportionate response of the Israel Defence Forces, and affirms that there must be an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people; further declares for the urgent release of all hostages and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population; further declares support for the calls by the United Nations and many other international actors for an immediate ceasefire on all sides of the conflict and supports the global consensus in support of a two-state solution with a sovereign, prosperous Palestinian state, living side by side with a safe and secure Israel; and notes the resolution of the House of Commons on 13th October 2014 calling on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to join with others in the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, and to call on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.]

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-06/debates/35BD7FEB-1FC5-41AE-9D3D-25FA6449D29C/CeasefireAndTheStateOfPalestine>

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>

House of Lords Library Briefing

Humanitarian situation in Gaza

<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/humanitarian-situation-in-gaza/>

Downing Street

Rishi Sunak To have a loved one taken hostage by terrorists is an unthinkable horror. Today I met again with British families still going through that harrowing ordeal. We will continue to do all we can to bring hostages held by Hamas in Gaza safely home. [plus photo]

<https://twitter.com/RishiSunak/status/1754895681326604466>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UK Minister in UAE for talks on building a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza

... UK Minister Lord Ahmad returns to the Middle East ... to continue the engagement with

key regional partners on the crisis in Gaza.

The Minister is in Abu Dhabi where he is expected to meet Foreign Minister, His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, to discuss the conflict in Israel and Gaza and the humanitarian situation in Gaza. He will look to build momentum on the UK initiative for an international 'Contact Group' for long-term peace and stability in the region.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for Middle East, said: The humanitarian situation in Gaza is desperate and there is an urgent need for an immediate pause to get life-saving aid in and hostages out.

The UK remains firmly committed to working with our key partners – like the UAE – to secure an immediate pause in fighting, make progress towards a sustainable ceasefire, and build momentum towards a long-term political solution to the crisis. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-minister-in-uae-for-talks-on-building-a-sustainable-ceasefire-in-gaza>

Humanitarian situation in Gaza: the UK government's response

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/humanitarian-situation-in-gaza-the-uk-governments-response/humanitarian-situation-in-gaza-the-uk-governments-response>

Lord (Tariq)Ahmad of Wimbledon Today, alongside Prime Minister @RishiSunak, I met the families of British hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. We updated them on [British flag] efforts to end the terrible ordeal of their loved ones. We are focused on securing agreements to end hostilities and to facilitate their safe release. [plus photo]

<https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1754908271968739335>

British Consulate General Jerusalem

Diplomatic missions urge Israel to cease demolitions of schools

Representatives of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the European Union together with the Palestinian Ministry of Education call on Israel to rescind its recent decision of the Israeli Civil Administration to demolish a donor-funded school in Amera, Hebron.

Israeli authorities issued a final demolition order against the school on Education Day (24th January), leaving the school at imminent risk of demolition. Should the demolition go ahead, 39 Palestinian school children will be deprived of their basic right to education. The nearest alternative schools are approximately 5km away. Without adequate transport, students must make the long journey by foot, exposed to settler attacks, a heavily trafficked road and inclement weather. Under these conditions, girls and children with disabilities in particular are at a high risk of dropping out.

Palestinian schools in Area C – including those funded by donors – remain vulnerable to Israeli demolitions and settler violence. Since 2022, Israeli authorities have demolished three donor-funded schools. In addition, three donor-funded schools have been vandalised by Israeli settlers and are currently not operational.

Under international law, Israel, as occupying power, has an obligation to ensure that the occupied civilian population has adequate access to basic education. Palestinian children's right to an education is undermined by Israel's planning and zoning system in Area C which prevents Palestinian development, and construction of schools in Area C.

Representatives of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the European Union call on Israel to halt demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian houses and property in accordance with its obligations as an occupying power under international humanitarian law, and to cease the policy of settlement construction and expansion, of designating land for exclusive Israeli use and of denying Palestinian development. Failure to do so seriously undermines a two state solution and is a major impediment to peace and security.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/diplomatic-missions-urge-israel-to-cease-demolitions-of-schools>

Scottish Government FoI Release

Funds sent to Gaza

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202300386454/>

United Nations

Secretary-General Appoints Independent Review Group to Assess United Nations Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees

... The Secretary-General, in consultation with United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini, has appointed an independent review group to assess whether the Agency is doing everything within its power to ensure neutrality and to respond to allegations of serious breaches when they are made.

The review will be led by Catherine Colonna, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, who will work with three research organizations: the Raoul Wallenberg Institute in Sweden, the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway and the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

The review group will begin its work on 14 February and is expected to submit an interim report to the Secretary-General late March 2024, with a final report expected to be completed by late April 2024. The final report will be made public.

This review is in response to a request made by UNRWA Commissioner-General Lazzarini earlier this year.

The review group's terms of reference are:

1. To identify the mechanisms and procedures that the Agency currently has in place to ensure neutrality and to respond to allegations or information indicating that the principle may have been breached;
2. To ascertain how those mechanisms and procedures have, or have not, been implemented in practice and whether every practicable effort has been made to apply them to their full potential, taking into account the particular operational, political and security environment in which the Agency works;
3. To assess the adequacy of those mechanisms and procedures and whether they are fit for purpose, including in relation to the management of risks and taking into account the particular operational, political and security context in which the Agency works; and
4. To make recommendations for the improvement and strengthening, if necessary, of the mechanisms and procedures that are currently in place or for the creation of new and alternative mechanisms and procedures that would be better fit for purpose, taking into account the particular operational, political and security context in which the Agency works.

The Secretary-General notes that these accusations come at a time when UNRWA, the largest UN organization in the region, is working under extremely challenging conditions to deliver life-saving assistance to the 2 million people in the Gaza Strip who depend on it for their survival amidst one of the largest and most complex humanitarian crises in the world.

This independent external review will take place in parallel with an investigation currently under way by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) into allegations of the involvement of 12 UNRWA personnel in the 7 October attacks. The cooperation of the Israeli authorities, who made these allegations, will be critical to the success of the investigation.

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22126.doc.htm>

Attacks on United States Personnel in Middle East, Retaliatory Strikes Threaten to Worsen Regional Stability, Political Affairs Chief Tells Security Council

... **Rosemary A. Dicarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs**, noted that the tensions that have engulfed multiple countries in the Middle East continue to rise, with near daily incidents in the region since mid-October 2023 — including some 165 attacks on United States facilities in Syria and Iraq, prompting American strikes in the two countries. Then, on 28 January, a drone attack killed three United States service members and injured 40 in north-east Jordan. ...

While Baghdad has continued to repeat its commitment to protecting United States and coalition forces inside Iraq, some armed factions linked to the “Islamic Resistance in Iraq” have pledged to continue their attacks against United States and coalition forces in the region. She further noted that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Hizbullah have exchanged fire across the Blue Line on an almost daily basis since 8 October. Ongoing Houthi drone and missile attacks and threats to navigation in the Red Sea are deeply worrying and risk both exacerbating the conflict and further impacting international trade. ...

She noted that it has been nearly five months since more than 1,200 Israelis were killed in the attacks by Hamas, with over 250 people taken hostage — a period of heartache and anguish for Israelis — echoing the Secretary-General’s call for their immediate and unconditional release. She further emphasized that the past five months have also been heartbreaking and catastrophic for Palestinian civilians in Gaza, where “hunger is rampant, disease is spreading and shelter is squalid at best for a vast number of people”. The death toll in the Gaza Strip is reported to have surpassed 27,000, with thousands more reported missing. The civilian population of Gaza should not pay for the terror unleashed by Hamas, she stated, reiterating the Secretary-General’s call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

She affirmed that the risk of escalation in the Middle East, and its potential consequences, was obvious from 7 October, as a quick survey of the agenda of the Council explains why: the United Nations is supporting political and peace processes throughout the region, in countries emerging, or still suffering, from armed conflict. Long-term regional stability demands the implementation of a clear political road map in each situation, while the Secretary-General continues his extensive outreach to all key stakeholders to urge all parties to take concrete measures to de-escalate tensions and to work towards sustainable political solutions that aim to resolve, rather than merely manage, long-standing conflicts. ...

The representative of the Russian Federation said that unlawful acts by Washington, D.C., in the Middle East occurred against the backdrop of an escalation of violence in the Palestine-Israel conflict. As a result of 85 so-called “retaliation strikes” on the territory of Iraq and Syria, civilians and soldiers died, he said, pointing to the aggressive nature of the

United States in the Middle East. He also highlighted the participation of the United Kingdom, stressing that the ongoing attacks against Yemen undermine the central role of the United Nations. ... The escalation of violence has already gone far beyond the Occupied Palestinian Territory, into the Red Sea and Yemen, he cautioned. ...

The representative of China said that the recent United States air strikes on multiple locations in Syria and Iraq have caused heavy casualties. Those acts constitute a grave violation of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and Iraq ... it is not right “to let the strongest fist have the final say”. ... The United States purports that it does not seek to create conflict in the Middle East; however, in reality, it does the opposite. ... Underneath the rising tensions in the Middle East in the past few months is the failure to implement the ceasefire in Gaza ...

The representative of the United Kingdom fully supported all efforts to maintain and enhance international peace and security, including in Iraq and Syria. “We are employing all diplomatic and security tools to seek the de-escalation of tensions in the Middle East,” she asserted, condemning the multiple attacks since October 2023 by Iran-aligned militant groups on the Global Coalition against Da’esh and Iraqi military bases in Syria and Iraq. ... Condemning the Houthis’ continued attacks on commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea, she said: “Our actions and presence in the Red Sea are designed to protect innocent lives, preserve freedom of navigation and deter further attacks on shipping ... [\[click here to read this speech in full\]](#)”

The representative of the United States recalled that, on 2 February, his country conducted precision air strikes in Iraq and Syria against Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and affiliated militia groups. This necessary and proportionate action was taken in exercise of his country’s inherent right to self-defence ... On 28 January, Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq attacked a Jordanian facility hosting United States forces taking part in the fight against Da’esh. As a result of these attacks, three United States service members lost their lives. The actions taken by the United States forces on 2 February were necessary and proportionate, he said ...

He further pointed out that these strikes are separate and distinct from the coalition strikes in Yemen which were in response to the Iranian-backed Houthis’ lawless attacks on naval vessels and international shipping in the Red Sea. The United States does not desire more conflict in the region where it is actively working towards de-escalating the conflict in Gaza. Also, “we are not seeking a direct conflict in Iran”, he asserted. ...

The representative of Switzerland expressed concern about the escalation that has been taking place in the region since the start of hostilities in Gaza, and which has reached a dangerous point with the events of the last 10 days. This has been the case not only in Syria and Iraq, but also along the Blue Line and in the Red Sea, he added. “There is a real risk to international peace and security in the region,” he warned ... a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza is necessary. ...

The representative of France condemned the 28 January strikes targeting United States soldiers engaged in the fight against Da’esh, which threatened the stability of the entire region. ... There will be no prospect of a just and lasting solution there until a credible and inclusive political process is initiated. ...

The representative of Syria stressed that Washington D.C.’s aggression against his country constitutes a threat to regional and international peace and security, in blatant violation of international law. “This aggression led to the martyrdom of 37 civilians and military personnel, and serious injury of 34 others, as well as the destruction of several civil residential buildings, a school and many civilian vehicles,” he said. ... “The United States is ... ignoring the fact that occupation has no right to self-defence, and that the root causes of conflicts, suffering, and instability in the region are the wrongful policies of the United States and its blind and unlimited support for the Israeli occupation entity,” he asserted. This includes the ongoing crime of genocide against the Palestinian people for more than 120 days, alongside Washington D.C.’s support for terrorist groups, including

Da'esh and Al-Nusra Front/Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham.

However, he emphasized that Washington D.C.'s aggression — accompanied by the repeated Israeli attacks on the Syrian territories and the crimes of terrorist organizations and separatist militias — will not deter Syria from continuing its quest. By all legitimate means, Syria will liberate its entire territory from the illegal foreign military presence, eliminate terrorism, restore State authority and the rule of law over its entire territories, and ensure security of its people. ...

The representative of Iraq noted ... that Iraq is suffering from allied friendly and neighbouring countries' attacks, which undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity. While reaffirming its concern to protect and strengthen such bilateral relations, he condemned and categorically rejected any attack against several areas within its territory, which have led to loss of life and injuries, undermining sovereignty and territorial integrity. ...

The representative of Iran strongly condemned Washington D.C.'s illegal military attacks on the territory of Iraq and Syria, as well as the joint military actions of the United States and the United Kingdom against Yemen. The two countries must bear their international responsibility for their commission of the crime of aggression, he asserted ... The United States continues to occupy Syria, loot Syrian resources, and support separatists and terrorist groups. Furthermore, people in Syria are experiencing economic hardship and a humanitarian crisis as a result of Washington D.C.'s hostile actions ...

Rejecting the baseless accusations against Iran, he stressed that his country never seeks to contribute to the spillover in the region. It has no military presence in Iraq, nor does it have bases or military advisers. In Syria, Iranian military advisers are legally present since they were invited officially by Syria's Government to fight terrorism. "It is evident to everyone that the root causes of the current situation in the region are occupation, aggression, and the continued genocide and horrific atrocities committed by the Israeli regime and fully supported by the [United States] against innocent Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank," he pointed out. Accordingly, the only solution to end the conflict in the region and prevent the spillover of the war is to force Israel to stop the genocide in Gaza, establish an immediate ceasefire, and end the presence of United States forces in Iraq and Syria.

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15577.doc.htm>

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>

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

**** closes in 5 days**

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>

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Enhanced Dataset [England] (closing date 5 March 2024)

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/clinical-audits-and-registries/female-genital-mutilation-datasets/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-enhanced-dataset-overview-of-2024-consultation>

**** Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill - Standard Tier** (closing date 18 March 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/martyns-law-standard-tier-consultation>

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