



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answers

Visa Scheme for Palestinian Refugees

Patrick Grady (SNP) [902325] If [the Minister] will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a visa scheme for Palestinian refugees.

The Minister for Legal Migration and the Border (Tom Pursglove): We are all concerned about the plight of those living in Gaza. Currently, we are not considering establishing a separate route for Palestinians. In any humanitarian situation, the UK must consider its resettlement approach in the round, rather than on a crisis-by-crisis basis.

Patrick Grady: It is not surprising that the upper tribunal found the decision to require biometric data for people from Gaza to be “irrational and unreasonable”, because most of us find that to apply to most decisions made by the Home Office. Is it not also irrational and unreasonable for the United Kingdom to offer humanitarian visas to people caught up in the conflicts in Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan, but not to offer such visas to people fleeing the conflict in Gaza?

Tom Pursglove: I will not give a running commentary on ongoing litigation, but I can say that we are supporting British nationals with dependants in Gaza to get those individuals out of Gaza safely, working in collaboration with Foreign Office colleagues. There are also marked differences at play here. Of course, the right of return is fundamental as part of efforts towards a two-state solution, and other factors are at play in responding to the Ukrainian situation. The dynamic is very

different, which directly affects the relationship we have with the Ukrainian Government, particularly in respect of the ability to carry out checks on individuals. ...

Alison Thewliss (SNP): Gaza Families Reunited's petition for a Palestinian family visa scheme has garnered 100,000 signatures, and I hope it will soon be debated in Parliament. Gazans are stuck in a cruel and irrational Catch-22 situation: they cannot cross the border to Egypt because they do not have visas, as they cannot get their biometrics registered, but they cannot get their biometrics registered because they cannot get to a visa application centre in Egypt. The Government have the power to waive the requirement for biometrics to be registered, and it is in the Minister's hands to do so. Why won't he?

Tom Pursglove: The hon. Lady will appreciate that the security of the system is imperative. We must act in accordance with the requirements, which we put front and centre. I will not comment on ongoing litigation, but I can say that we will continue to work with Foreign Office colleagues in the way that we have described. Elements of the peace process are at play in relation to these issues, but we will keep our response to this crisis under review as matters develop.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-15/debates/60D0E436-0E9A-4492-A909-E09B96FA382F/VisaSchemeForPalestinianRefugees>

The Upper Tribunal judgement referred to above can be read at

<https://tribunalsdecisions.service.gov.uk/utiac/jr-2024-lon-000082-jr-2024-lon-000128>

The petition referred to above can be read at

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/648577>

Topical Questions: Home Department

James Murray (Labour Co-op) [902350] My constituent Maysara is a British citizen, and his parents live in Gaza. His parents successfully applied for visas to visit him in the autumn last year, but they were unable to travel after 7 October, and their visas expired. I contacted the Home Office on Maysara's behalf to ask if those visas could be extended, but I was told that his parents would have to make new applications. However, there are no functioning visa application centres in Gaza, so will the Minister explain what exactly my constituent's parents should do?

James Cleverly: I am more than happy to look at the details of the case. The hon. Gentleman has to understand that the circumstances on the ground changed dramatically after Hamas' brutal mass murder rampage on 7 October, and our security posture in the region has had to be enhanced. I am not making any implications about his constituent's family, but he and the House will understand that we must be careful in everything we do when it comes to accepting people who are leaving Gaza in these circumstances.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-15/debates/BFCF78BF-67BE-4E6E-8358-27FAD2D74FA3/TopicalQuestions#contribution-984B38F2-9C54-428A-BD91-A2D55DF36542>

Topical Questions: Home Department

Yvette Cooper (Labour): ... We strongly condemn Iran's attack on Israel this weekend, and we must do everything we can to prevent further escalation in the middle east, but there are also domestic security issues in relation to Iran. The Iran International journalist Pouria Zeraati was attacked on the streets of London a few weeks ago following repeated Iran-related security threats on British soil, including threats to kidnap and kill. Does the Home Secretary believe it is now time to proscribe the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the UK?

James Cleverly: The right hon. Lady will know that we keep our response to Iran under constant review, and of course we have done so in the light of the attack in

Wimbledon. We do not speculate about future designations or sanctions, but she will know that the IRGC is sanctioned in its entirety and a number of its members are sanctioned as individuals. As she knows, we will keep this under constant review.

Yvette Cooper: The Home Secretary will know that we have raised this many times. I understand the complexity of the issue. The proscribing legislation was drawn up more than 20 years ago to address terrorist threats such as al-Qaeda, rather than state-sponsored threats that have both domestic and international security objectives. Our bottom line must be keeping this country safe, which is why Labour has proposed new security legislation to allow the Government to put appropriately targeted proscription-style restrictions on the operations of state-linked organisations such as the IRGC. The Government previously resisted this, but will he look at it again in the light of recent events and work with us on any legislation that is needed to keep this country safe?

James Cleverly: We have the National Security Act 2023 and a range of tools at our disposal. Defence against state threats is one of the Department's priorities, and my right hon. Friend the Security Minister leads on its practical implementation. I can reassure the shadow Home Secretary and the House that we constantly review the range of options at our disposal and deploy those that are most appropriate. Protecting the UK and the people living and working here against state threats will always be a priority of this Government.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-15/debates/BFCF78BF-67BE-4E6E-8358-27FAD2D74FA3/TopicalQuestions#contribution-C22307B6-2364-4E96-8722-C6202E6306B4>

House of Commons Library Briefing

Proscribed terrorist organisations

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN00815/SN00815.pdf>

Department of Health and Social Care

Causes of death to be scrutinised in revamp of death certificates

To strengthen safeguards, medical examiners will look at the cause of death in all cases that have not been referred to the coroner. ...

From September, medical examiners will look at the cause of death in all cases that have not been referred to the coroner in a move designed to help strengthen safeguards and prevent criminal activity.

They will also consult with families or representatives of the deceased, providing an opportunity for them to raise questions or concerns with a senior doctor not involved in the care of the person who died.

The changes demonstrate the government's commitment to providing greater transparency after a death and will ensure the right deaths are referred to coroners for further investigation.

Health Minister, Maria Caulfield, said: Reforming death certification is a highly complex and sensitive process, so it was important for us to make sure we got these changes right. At such a difficult time, it's vital that bereaved families have full faith in how the death of their loved one is certified and have their voices heard if they are concerned in any way.

The measures I'm introducing today will ensure all deaths are reviewed and the bereaved are fully informed, making the system safer by improving protections against rare abuses. Medical examiners are senior medical doctors that independently scrutinise the causes of death. Since 2019, NHS trusts have appointed medical examiners to scrutinise most

deaths in acute healthcare settings and some community settings on a non-statutory basis. From 9 September 2024 it will become a requirement that all deaths in any health setting that are not referred to the coroner in the first instance are subject to medical examiner scrutiny.

Welcoming the announcement today, Dr Suzy Lishman CBE, Senior Advisor on Medical Examiners for the Royal College of Pathologists, said: ... the Royal College of Pathologists welcomes the announcement of the statutory implementation date for these important death certification reforms.

Medical examiners are already scrutinising the majority of deaths in England and Wales, identifying concerns, improving care for patients and supporting bereaved people. The move to a statutory system in September will further strengthen those safeguards, ensuring that all deaths are reviewed and that the voices of all bereaved people are heard. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/causes-of-death-to-be-scrutinised-in-revamp-of-death-certificates>

The Medical Examiners (England) Regulations 2024

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2024/493/made>

The Medical Examiners (Wales) Regulations 2024

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2024/505/contents/made>

The Medical Certificate of Cause of Death Regulations 2024

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2024/492/made>

The National Medical Examiner (Additional Functions) Regulations 2024

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2024/494/made>

Death certification reform and the introduction of medical examiners: updated summary of impact

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

Medical Examiners (Wales) Regulations 2024: integrated impact assessment

<https://www.gov.wales/medical-examiners-wales-regulations-2024-integrated-impact-assessment.html>

Scottish Parliament Ministerial Statement and Q&A

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 (Implementation)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): ... Let me begin by emphasising that we in Scotland should be rightly proud of our history as a welcoming nation that celebrates and values diversity in our communities. However, we must be vigilant in protecting those values, challenge those who deny them and recognise that there are people who experience hatred and prejudice every day. We cannot and must not be complacent. We should remember that when we talk about hate crime, we are describing behaviour that is criminal and is rooted in prejudice, where the offender's actions have been driven by hatred towards a particular group—hatred for people just on the basis of who they are.

Police Scotland describes hate crimes as offences that include, but are not limited to,

assault, verbal abuse, damage to property, threatening behaviour, robbery and harassment, and they can take place anywhere, including online.

The hate crime act maintains and consolidates existing legislative protections against offences that are aggravated by prejudice against the following five characteristics: disability, race, religion, sexual orientation and transgender identity. Those are the same characteristics that are protected under hate crime legislation in England and Wales. ...

The act introduces new offences for threatening and/or abusive behaviour and the communication of threatening or abusive material that is intended to stir up hatred against a group of people who possess or appear to possess the particular characteristics that I have outlined. That could take many forms, including pictures, videos or information posted on websites.

Lord Bracadale, who led the independent review of hate crime legislation that led to the act, was clear on the need for the legislation to include offences relating to stirring up hatred. He noted: "Stirring up of hatred might lead to violence or public disorder." ...

Those offences are similar to those that are covered by the legislation in England and Wales, which has criminalised stirring up hatred on the ground of religion since 2007 and on the ground of sexual orientation since 2010. ...

It is also important to note that the new offences have a higher threshold for a crime to be committed than the long-standing offence of stirring up racial hatred, which has been in place for the best part of 40 years without controversy.

People can still be offensive, critical and insulting under the act—and we have seen people be exactly that. The act includes rigorous safeguards on freedom of speech, and behaviour or material is not to be taken to be threatening or abusive just because it involves discussion or criticism of matters that relate to one of the characteristics included in legislation. The act is compatible with the European convention on human rights, and it specifically provides that the court should have regard to the general principle that article 10 rights apply to the expression of information or ideas that offend, shock or disturb. ...

There is nothing in the hate crime act that is divisive. ...

The act is an essential element of our wider approach, as set out in "Hate Crime Strategy for Scotland ... to build a Scotland in which everyone can feel safe. ... The reality is that there are people who are frightened to leave their home, who avoid public places, and who significantly alter their lives in order to avoid certain interactions. ...

Legislation to protect people from hatred and prejudice is not new, and nor is it unique to Scotland. ...

In March, Adam Tomkins, who is a former Conservative MSP and a professor of public law, stated: "Offensive speech is not criminalised by this legislation: the only speech relating to sexual orientation, transgender identity, age or disability outlawed here is speech which ... a reasonable person ... would consider to be threatening or abusive and which ... was intended to stir up hatred and ... was not reasonable in the circumstances."

Since 2014-15, the number of hate crimes recorded annually has been between 6,300 and 7,000. In 2021-22, the police recorded 6,927 hate crimes, and 62 per cent of those included a race aggravator. In 2020-21, almost a quarter of all victims were police officers. ...

In the first week of implementation, Police Scotland received more than 7,000 reports of hate crime, the vast majority of which were not considered to be criminal. Of the 445 hate crimes recorded over the period 1 April to 14 April, only seven of those were stirring-up offences.

In the past week, there has been a 74.4 per cent decrease in online reports, to 1,832. Sadly, the number of recorded hate crimes did not decrease so significantly, which again reinforces the importance of the legislation. ...

People and communities who are at the sharp end of hatred in their daily lives simply for being who they are should rightly look to the Parliament to stand with them, and the Scottish Government will continue to do so. ...

Russell Findlay (Conservative): ... Police Scotland has been bombarded with almost

9,000 reports because of Humza Yousaf's hate crime law—a law that threatens free speech, and which is critically different from competent legislation elsewhere in the UK ... The vast majority of those 9,000 reports are not of crimes ... Scotland is not suffering from a hate epidemic ...

Angela Constance: ... I, for one, will not turn a blind eye to hate crime or to the victims who suffer at the hands of those who perpetrate hate. ...

First, we should be united on the evils of hate crime and on the corrosive effect that it has on individuals, families and communities the length and breadth of Scotland. Secondly, I say to Mr Findlay that we should be united, and on the same script in strongly calling for people not to waste police time and discouraging them from doing so. ...

Katy Clark (Labour): Does the cabinet secretary accept that the first few days of the implementation of the act have been a shambles, that poor communication has led to confusion over what is a hate crime and that there has been a loss of public confidence? The police have been overwhelmed and the Scottish Police Federation has said that the training has not been good enough. ... Will the cabinet secretary commit to adding sex as a characteristic and to undertaking an urgent review of the operation of the act?

Angela Constance: ... The legislation is there to protect vulnerable communities; it is not there to be weaponised by people, irrespective of what side of the so-called culture wars they are on.

I have been very clear that I will introduce legislation to tackle misogyny. ... It was due to the representation of many women's groups, which did not want sex to be captured, that sex was not included as a characteristic in the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021. There are many reasons for that. For example, women are not a minority; we make up 51 per cent of the population. ...

Sharon Dowey (Conservative): Although the Scottish Government has spent £400,000 on advertising its new hate crime legislation, the public and the police still lack clarity on the definition of a hate crime. ... Does the Scottish Government believe that a two-hour training module, which some officers are still to complete, is enough to enable officers to enforce the legislation without arresting innocent people?

Angela Constance: ... I would have hoped that members would have been reassured by the fact that, according to the deputy chief constable, more than 80 per cent of police officers have been trained. ...

John Swinney (SNP): Given that thresholds relating to the stirring up of racial hatred have been in place in legislation for more than 40 years in Scotland, what approach is enshrined in the 2021 act in relation to the other characteristics that are now in scope with regard to the thresholds for whether an offence has been committed? Does the 2021 act take the same approach as was taken in relation to racial hatred, or does it take a tougher approach? ...

Angela Constance: The hate crime legislation that has been passed by this Parliament takes a tougher approach. A racial hatred offence has been in place across the UK since 1986. The Public Order Act 1986 criminalises behaviour that is "threatening, abusive or insulting" when the perpetrator either "intends ... to stir up racial hatred" or is "likely" to stir up racial hatred. That is a lower threshold for criminality than is in place for the new stirring-up offences under the 2021 act.

The 2021 act does not change the UK-wide offence in relation to racial hatred. The UK-wide offence is wider than the offences under the 2021 act, as there is no requirement for intent to stir up hatred, and it covers behaviour or communication that is insulting as well as that which is threatening or abusive. Under the 2021 act, the behaviour has to be threatening and/or abusive and intended to stir up hatred, which is a high threshold for criminality. ...

Rona Mackay (SNP): During the past few weeks, the people whose voices have been drowned out by Tory misinformation regarding the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland)

Act 2021 are those who will benefit from the legislation. Can the cabinet secretary detail how the 2021 act will help to provide greater protection for victims and communities?

Angela Constance: The 2021 act provides greater protections because it extends the stirring up of hatred offence to all characteristics that are protected, as outlined in the act, including the new characteristic of age, which is therefore now in line with the existing offence of stirring up racial hatred that has been part of criminal law across the UK for decades.

It is well worth our while to note that approximately a third of hate crimes in Scotland involve a victim who has experienced an incident at their place of work or as part of their occupation. Most of those victims were working in retail and other service industries, and a quarter of recorded hate crimes had a police officer victim. Everyone in the chamber should want to protect people and society from such crimes. ...

Fulton MacGregor (SNP): For the most part, the 2021 act consolidates hate crime legislation in one place. Is the effect of the act to properly recognise that crimes against public order, such as being threatening or abusive, which have long been in place, along with stirring up hatred against the community, are exactly that—hate crimes—and should be recognised as such?

Angela Constance: That is absolutely the case. The 2021 act outlines that the offences that are covered in the legislation are hate crimes and are not acceptable. Understandably, there has been a lot of media coverage of the number of reports that Police Scotland has received. The very fact that we saw 213 police-recorded hate crimes last week and 232 the week before that reinforces the importance of the 2021 act. The act is an essential element of our wider approach to tackling hate crime, as well as to recognising the harm that hate crime causes. The legislation sends an important message to victims, offenders and wider society that such crime should not and will not be tolerated.

Maggie Chapman (Green): In the first week since the 2021 act's implementation, Police Scotland indicated that only 3.8 per cent of the allegations that were received were authentic—240 were logged as hate crimes and 30 as non-hate crimes. Does the cabinet secretary believe that those numbers were due to the widespread misinformation ...

Angela Constance: ... There is no doubt that Police Scotland received a high volume of online hate crime reports, but we should all be encouraged by having seen a nearly 75 per cent decrease in the past week, with the number of calls falling from in excess of 7,000 to in excess of 1,800. ...

To read the full transcript see

https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-16-04-2024?meeting=15798&iob=134856#orscontributions_M1735E440P776C2576911

The Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021, referred to above, can be read at
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2021/14/contents>

The Bracadale Review, referred to above, can be read at
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/independent-review-hate-crime-legislation-scotland-final-report/>

The Hate Crime Strategy referred to above can be read at
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/hate-crime-strategy-scotland/>

Adam Tomkins' comments referred to above can be read at
<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24199465.scotlands-new-hate-crime-law-doesnt-criminalise-offensive-speech/>

Israel

See also Commons oral answers “Visa Scheme for Palestinian Refugees” and “Topical Questions: Home Department”, and the Commons Library Briefing “Proscribed terrorist organisations” that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Ministerial Statement and Q&A

Iran-Israel Update

col 23 The Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak): ... On Saturday evening, Iran sought to plunge the middle east into a new crisis. It launched a barrage of missiles and attack drones over Iraq and Jordan, and towards Israel. The scale of the attack, and the fact that it was targeted directly at Israel, are without precedent. It was a reckless and dangerous escalation. If it had succeeded, the fallout for regional security and the toll on Israeli citizens would have been catastrophic, but it did not succeed.

In support of Israel’s own defensive action, the United Kingdom joined a US-led international effort, along with France and partners in the region, that intercepted almost all of the missiles, saving lives in Israel and its neighbours. We sent additional RAF Typhoons to the region as part of our existing operations against Daesh in Iraq and Syria, and I can confirm that our forces destroyed a number of Iranian drones. We also provided important intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support for our partners. Our pilots put themselves in harm’s way to protect the innocent and preserve peace and stability. I spoke to the RAF earlier today; they are the best of the best, and I know that the whole House will join me in expressing our gratitude.

With this attack, Iran has once again shown its true colours. It is intent on sowing chaos in its own backyard—on further destabilising the middle east. Our aim is to support stability and security because that is right for the region, and because although the middle east is thousands of miles away, it has a direct effect on our security and prosperity at home, so we are working urgently with our allies to de-escalate the situation and prevent further bloodshed. We want to see calmer heads prevail, and we are directing all our diplomatic efforts to that end.

Yesterday I spoke to my fellow G7 leaders. We are united in our condemnation of this attack. We discussed further potential diplomatic measures, which we will be working together to co-ordinate in the coming days. I will also shortly speak to Prime Minister Netanyahu to express our solidarity with Israel in the face of this attack, and to discuss how we can prevent further escalation. All sides must show restraint.

Our actions reflect our wider strategy in the middle east, which I have set out in the House previously. I believe there are three vital steps to put the region on to a better path. First, we must uphold regional security against hostile actors, including in the Red sea, and we must ensure Israel’s security. That is non-negotiable and a fundamental condition for peace in the region. In the face of the threats that we saw this weekend, Israel has our full support.

col 24 Secondly, we must invest more deeply in the two-state solution. That is what we

have been doing over the past six months, including working closely with the Palestinian Authority, so that when the time comes, they can provide more effective governance for Gaza and the west bank. It is significant that other regional partners actually helped to prevent a much worse attack over the weekend. It reminds us how important the attempts to normalise relations between Israel and its neighbours really are, and they hold out precious hope for the region.

Thirdly, the conflict in Gaza must end. Hamas, who are backed by Iran, started this war. They wanted not just to kill and murder, but to destabilise the whole region. This weekend, they rejected the latest hostage deal, which offered a road to a ceasefire. It is Israel's right, and indeed its duty, to defeat the threat from Hamas terrorists and defend its security. I want to be clear: nothing that has happened over the past 48 hours affects our position on Gaza. The appalling toll on civilians continues to grow—the hunger, the desperation and the loss of life on an awful scale. The whole country wants to see an end to the bloodshed, and to see more humanitarian support going in. The recent increase in aid flows is positive, but it is still not enough. We need to see new crossings open for longer to get in vital supplies.

I want to take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, to pay tribute to the three British aid workers who were killed in Gaza: John Chapman, James Kirby and James Henderson. They were heroes. The children of Gaza whom they were risking their lives to feed need a humanitarian pause immediately, leading to a long-term sustainable ceasefire. That is the fastest way to get hostages out and aid in, and to stop the fighting. Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve to live in peace, dignity and security, and so do people across the entire region.

In conclusion, Saturday's attack was the act not of a people, but of a despotic regime, and it is emblematic of the dangers that we face today. The links between such regimes are growing. Tel Aviv was not the only target of Iranian drones on Saturday; Putin was also launching them at Kyiv and Kharkiv. And who was the sole voice speaking up for Iran yesterday, seeking to justify its actions? Russia.

The threats to stability are growing, not just in the middle east but everywhere, and we are meeting those threats, time after time, with British forces at the forefront. It is why our pilots were in action this weekend. It is why they have been policing the skies above Iraq and Syria for a decade. It is why our sailors are defending freedom of navigation in the Red sea against the reckless attacks of the Iran-backed Houthi militia. It is why our soldiers are on the ground in Kosovo, Estonia, Poland and elsewhere, and it is why we have led the way in backing Ukraine, and we will continue to back it for as long as it takes. When adversaries such as Russia or Iran threaten peace and prosperity, we will always stand in their way, ready to defend our values and our interests, shoulder to shoulder with our friends and our allies. ...

col/ 25 Keir Starmer (Labour): ... we support the defensive action taken by the UK, alongside our international allies, against the Iranian attacks on Israel, and we welcome the Prime Minister's call for restraint. ... We also support the RAF planes being sent to the region ...

There can be no doubt that the attack perpetrated by Iranian forces this weekend has left the world a more dangerous place. It targeted innocent civilians, with a clear intent to destabilise the region. It must be wholly condemned by all, but let us also be clear that a full-scale conflict in the middle east is in no one's interest. It is a path that can only lead to more bloodshed, more instability and the unleashing of forces that are beyond the ability of anyone to control.

The combined defensive action this weekend was a success and, because of that, lives were saved. As a result, escalation is not inevitable. In repelling the attack, Israel showed strength and courage. It must now show the same strength and courage to de-escalate. That has to be the primary objective, and that is the responsibility of all sides and every partner. We must be resolute and united in our support for the collective security of Israel,

Jordan and other partners in the region.

But tensions remain very high. We must proceed calmly, carefully and with restraint, because if diplomacy takes centre stage—and it must—we also need to be clear that diplomatic premises should not be targeted and attacked. That is a point of principle, but as the condemnation from our G7 allies rightly notes, Iran's response this weekend was unprecedented—a further step towards the destabilisation of the region and the risk of escalation. Nobody in this House should be, or is, under any illusion: this is a regime that sponsors terror across the middle east and beyond, that murders and represses its own people and supports Putin's war efforts in Ukraine. So can the Prime Minister update the House on any new steps he is taking with our international partners to pursue sanctions against the regime, and can he clarify what steps he is taking to limit the power of the revolutionary guard to glorify terrorism here in the UK?

While there is no justification for Iran's actions, we cannot be naive to the fact that one of the drivers of tension in the region is the ongoing war in Gaza. Six months on from the horrific Hamas terror attack, hostages remain separated from their families, thousands of innocent Palestinians have been killed, and now more than a million people face the imminent threat of famine—so I urge the Government again to use every ounce of diplomatic leverage that we have to make sure that aid to Gaza is unimpeded and drastically scaled up. Alongside that, we reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire, for Hamas to release hostages and for a return to a diplomatic process that can rekindle the hope of a two-state solution.

col 26 It is right that we condemn Iran's action, it is right that we work with others to defend the security of our allies, and it is right that we seek the end of conflict in Gaza. But this is a moment for restraint, because escalation will only lead to further destruction; and, for the sake of all those still caught in the horror and violence, that must be avoided.

The Prime Minister: ... Israel has a right to self-defence, as any state does. The G7 leaders spoke yesterday and unequivocally condemned Iran's attack, and expressed full solidarity and support for Israel and its people. But as the Foreign Secretary said this morning, this is a time to be "smart as well as tough".

Israel has incredibly successfully repelled the Iranian attack, and Iran is even more isolated on the world stage. As others have said, we urge Israel to take the win at this point. We want to avoid further escalation and bloodshed—the right hon. and learned Gentleman is right that that would be deeply destabilising for the region and would risk more lives—and all our diplomatic efforts at this point will be geared towards that goal, in partnership with our allies.

As I have said previously, the behaviour of the Iranian regime, including the actions of IRGC, poses a significant threat to the safety and security of the UK and our allies. Yesterday at the G7, we agreed to work together on further measures to counter the Iranian regime and its proxies. ... we have already sanctioned over 400 Iranian individuals, including the IRGC in its entirety. ...

Lastly, with regard to diplomacy for Israel and the region, we are absolutely committed to a two-state solution. We have been working very hard and using all our efforts to bring that about, particularly over the past few months, by building up the capability of the Palestinian Authority, as I have said, so that they have the necessary technical and administrative capability when the moment comes for them to provide effective governance in the west bank and Gaza. It is absolutely my view, and that of the Government, that Israelis and Palestinians should have the opportunity to live side by side in peace, with security, dignity and opportunity, and I am proud of the role that the United Kingdom is playing.

col 27 **Alicia Kearns (Conservative):** ... This remains a dangerous moment, yet over the weekend we saw a demonstration of unity and purpose. We saw the depth of will for normalisation and for a secure future for all peoples of the middle east. Restraint is vital if we want to build on the momentum to get hostages home to their families and to get

improvements to continuing aid, but to better protect our people, will my right hon. Friend commit to launching with our allies a new consensus on Iran and a new effort—with combined diplomatic, military and wider expert areas—to limit the extent of the atrocities of Iran? ...

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. Friend that commitment. ... Iran's nuclear programme has never been more advanced than it is today; it threatens international peace and security. There is absolutely no justification, at a civilian level, for the enrichment that we are seeing and which the International Atomic Energy Agency has reported in Iran. ... we are committed to using all diplomatic tools available to ensure that Iran never develops a nuclear weapon, including using the snapback mechanism if necessary.

Mhairi Black (SNP): ... I condemn the acts of violence by the Iranian regime. They are no more than a cynical attempt to exploit the suffering, pain and turmoil being experienced by people in Palestine right now. While we rightly condemn the violent acts of Iran, so too must we condemn the violent acts of Israel. From listening to the interviews that he has been giving, the Foreign Secretary is correct in his attempt to uphold the principle of proportionality, but if firing 100 missiles in retaliation for an isolated attack on an embassy is—correctly—considered disproportionate, so too must be Israel's 192-day bombardment of Gaza. ...

There is not going to be a military solution to the conflict in the middle east. There must be a political and diplomatic solution, so what is required now is the same as what was required six months ago: we need de-escalation, and for the causes of conflict in the region to be reviewed. The biggest continuing cause of conflict is the siege of Gaza; hence the need for a ceasefire. ...

The Prime Minister: First, it is important not to try to draw any equivalence between Israel's absolute right—indeed, duty—to provide security for its citizens in the face of an appalling terrorist atrocity and what happened over the weekend. Those things are not remotely the same.

col 28 More broadly, though, as I have said repeatedly ... we urge Israel to abide by international humanitarian law. We have been very clear that too many civilians have been killed, and we are deeply concerned about the impact on the civilian population in Gaza ...

Jeremy Quin (Conservative): Notwithstanding the sheer scale of the Iranian attack, multi-layered air defence proved effective. Are we ensuring that we are passing any learnings we have picked up on to Ukraine ...

The Prime Minister: ... He is right about the importance of air defence, which is why it has repeatedly been one of the key capabilities that we have sought to provide to Ukraine ...

Ed Davey (Liberal Democrat): ... The Liberal Democrats join him in condemning Iran's attack on Israel: this is an alarming escalation in a conflict that has already seen far too many deaths and far too much suffering. We support the action taken by the RAF to intercept Iranian drones as we stand up for Israel's security.

We also worry about what Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Government will do next. The Prime Minister has rightly said that we must prevent further escalation, so does he agree that the best way to achieve that is to press all sides to agree to an immediate bilateral ceasefire in Gaza to get the hostages home, get the aid in, and put us on the path to a lasting peace for a two-state solution?

The Prime Minister: We have repeatedly called for an immediate humanitarian pause so that we can get the hostages out and more aid in, and use that as the foundation to build a more lasting and sustainable ceasefire, but it is worth pointing out—this has not been mentioned by colleagues so far—that Hamas, yet again, have rejected another offer to release hostages. It is important that we do not lose sight of that. We must have the hostages released as part of any of those

conversations, and over the weekend it was Hamas who yet again rejected the latest round of those talks.

col 29 Liam Fox (Conservative): ... we have seen a military attack by Iran on a nation that its regime believes should not exist at all. Iran has directly or indirectly engineered a war in Gaza, with the aim of thwarting better relations between Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia, and Israel. We now have death and destruction in Gaza in a conflict that no one can win, and where the only beneficiaries are Iran, its proxies and its allies. ... why is Iran Air still operating out of Heathrow, and why are Iranian banks still operating in the City of London? ...

The Prime Minister: ... on all of the areas that he mentioned, active work has been undertaken by the Government. ...

George Howarth (Labour): ... As the Prime Minister has said, there is no moral equivalence between the two sides in this—what is happening in Gaza and what happened in the attacks by Iran on Israel—but Israel has made mistakes in the past and should be held to account for them. Would the Prime Minister agree with me that, as things move on, the importance of neighbouring states—particularly, for example, Jordan—is going to be vital ...

The Prime Minister: In a word, yes. I pay tribute to the King of Jordan for the leadership role that he has played over the past several months. We are fortunate to enjoy a strong working relationship with the Jordanians, which was on display yet again over this weekend, and I commend him and his country for what they have done.

col 30 Suella Braverman (Conservative): ... Two weeks ago, I was in Israel at the northern border with Lebanon. Of course, we have all seen what happened this weekend, but since 7 October Iran-backed Hezbollah has fired over 4,000 rockets into northern Israel, displacing over 150,000 Israeli civilians. ... They are under siege and they have been uprooted, but they are brave and defiant in the face of terrorism and antisemitism. We have known for years that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is the world's chief sponsor of terrorism, funding and promoting terrorist plots, radicalisation and hostage taking both in the middle east and at home. We have proscribed Hamas and we have proscribed Hezbollah. Prime Minister, why do we not put the UK's national security first by now proscribing the IRGC?

The Prime Minister: ... we do not comment on any potential proscription decisions, but of course we recognise the threat from Iran ...

Rushanara Ali (Labour): Despite the calls for a ceasefire here in our Parliament and from across the international community, the war in Gaza has raged, costing 33,000 lives as well as the 1,200 killed by the Hamas attacks and a humanitarian catastrophe that is now turning into a famine. ... precisely what conversations is the Prime Minister having with leading figures in the Israeli Government, as well as through various parties to influence the Iranian regime to de-escalate ...

The Prime Minister: Both the Defence Secretary and the Foreign Secretary have spoken to their counterparts over the weekend, and the Foreign Secretary has spoken to the Iranian Foreign Minister specifically to urge de-escalation and condemn what happened over the weekend. I will be speaking to Prime Minister Netanyahu shortly ...

Ben Wallace (Conservative): There is another country that is under almost constant daily bombardment by Iranian-made drones: Ukraine. Some three years ago I pleaded with the Israelis to help Ukraine against Russia, and they refused ... I know the Prime Minister will be speaking to the Prime Minister of Israel later today; now that RAF pilots have quite rightly gone to the defence of Israel, could he perhaps ask that Israel now decides it is time to help Ukraine in its hour of need, and we can see off both Russia and Iranian aggression?

col 31 The Prime Minister: ... My statement alluded to the fact that the Ukrainians were suffering from Iranian drones over the same weekend that this happened. ...

John McDonnell (Labour): There is rightly consensus across the House to call for restraint from the Israeli Government, but we have called for restraint before: we called for restraint with regard to the attack on Gaza, yet the indiscriminate bombing took place; we called for restraint on the settlements in the west bank, yet the settlements have expanded; we called for restraint so that food could be got to the children of Gaza, yet malnutrition is killing some of them. So what action will the Government take if Israel does not show restraint, because we are in danger of the middle east being set alight by the decisions taken by the right-wing factions within the Netanyahu Cabinet?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry, but I missed the part of the right hon. Gentleman's question where he condemned Iran and Hamas for what they have done. ...

Kit Malthouse (Conservative): The Prime Minister was right to authorise the defence of Israel and the avoidance of violence and death, but violence has also erupted in the west bank over the last few days, as he will know. What concrete steps can we take to protect those civilians?

The Prime Minister: I have personally repeatedly raised with Prime Minister Netanyahu the issue of settler violence in the west bank. ... We have joined with allies in sanctioning the activity of particular individuals where it has been brought to our attention and we will continue to ensure that the Israeli Government do everything they can to reduce tension in the west bank. ...

col 32 **George Galloway (Workers Party of Britain):** ... There was not one single word in the Prime Minister's statement of condemnation of the Israeli destruction of the Iranian consulate in Damascus, which is the proximate reason for the event ...

The Prime Minister: Whatever may have happened a few weeks ago, it is absolutely no justification for launching more than 300 drones and missiles from one sovereign state towards Israel—it is as simple as that. In the hon. Gentleman's question, not once did he condemn that action or, indeed, the actions of Hamas in the region. There is no equivalence between these things whatever, and to suggest otherwise is simply wrong.

Robert Halfon (Conservative): ... Last year, as Israel and Saudi Arabia were about to strike a transformational agreement, Iran-backed Hamas carried out its massacre on 7 October with the aim of torpedoing the chance of peace between Israel and the Arab nations. Last Saturday's drone attack by Iran being thwarted by Israel and her allies, including Jordan, demonstrates that our countries can work alongside Israel after this new period of contention. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this represents a new opportunity for Israel and the Arab nations to rebuild relations in the aftermath of 7 October and bring the hostages home?

The Prime Minister: ... It is significant that other regional partners helped to prevent a much worse attack over the weekend. It reminds us how important the attempts are to normalise relations between Israel and its neighbours. ...

Dawn Butler (Labour): ... Prime Minister, I condemn Iran and Hamas—let me start there—but we must not lose focus on the situation in Gaza, where there is a humanitarian crisis and famine. It is just destruction that people are seeing in front of their eyes. If we want to ensure that the hostages come home—like the hostage who has been adopted in Brent, Noa Argamani—we must argue for a ceasefire, not a pause. ...

The Prime Minister: It is wrong to suggest in any way that we have lost sight of what is happening in Gaza. ... far more aid has to get in, and that is pressure that we will continue to put on all partners concerned.

col 33 **Iain Duncan Smith (Conservative):** ... Every country—not just Israel, but other Arab countries—fear what Tehran is doing in their countries as well, which is something we forget. ...

The Prime Minister: ... we are urgently working with our allies to see what steps we can take together in a co-ordinated fashion to deter and condemn what Iran is doing. ...

Zarah Sultana (Labour): ... It was recently revealed that [Alicia Kearns] told a private fundraising event: “The Foreign Office has received official legal advice that Israel has broken international humanitarian law, but the Government has not announced it.” ...

Was the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee telling the truth—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: ... We have one of the most robust arms export licensing control regimes in the entire world. We have previously assessed that Israel is committed and capable of complying with international humanitarian law. ... the UK position on export licences is unchanged and, following the latest assessment, is in line with our legal advice. ...

Matt Hancock (Independent): ... will [the Prime Minister] also thank those US service personnel ... who were prepared to act as a moment’s notice to defend Israel against this attack ...

col 34 **The Prime Minister:** I am happy to join my right hon. Friend in paying tribute not just to our colleagues in America but to our partners across the region, who participated in a joint international effort. That was all in support of Israel’s own actions; its armed forces also deserve enormous praise for the success with which they repelled this awful attack.

Ian Blackford (SNP): ... There must be no further escalation in the middle east. Now is the time to recognise that both Israelis and Palestinians must live in peace, and for that we need the two-state solution. ...

Rehman Chishti (Conservative): ... what information or intelligence does the Prime Minister have about what went on in Iran’s consulate in Damascus that led to the attack? ...

The Prime Minister: Whatever happened in that situation has not been confirmed. Regardless, there can never be any justification for a sovereign country launching over 300 drones and missiles towards Israel. ...

col 35 **Richard Burgon (Labour):** ... This is a very dangerous moment. The UN Secretary-General rightly told the Security Council last night: “Now is the time to defuse and de-escalate”.

Ordinary people in both Israel and Iran, and across the whole region and the wider world, will pay the price if this escalates. The Secretary-General also rightly reiterated the call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza ... This is the first opportunity that we have had to question the Prime Minister since the recent killing of British nationals in Gaza. Is he planning to appoint an independent adviser to scrutinise the Israeli inquiry into those deaths of British nationals, similar to what Australia has done?

The Prime Minister: I spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu after that incident to express our very strong concerns about what happened. We are carefully reviewing the initial findings of Israel’s investigations into the killing of the aid workers, and welcome the suspension of two officers as a first step. The findings must be published and followed up with an independent review to ensure the utmost transparency and accountability.

Michael Ellis (Conservative): ... Saudi Arabia ... has now said in an official statement that Iran “engineered a war in Gaza” in order to destroy the progress that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was making in normalising relations with Israel. ... Is my right hon. Friend as hopeful as I am that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Israel ... will normalise their relations as soon as possible ...

The Prime Minister: I had a very constructive meeting in Saudi Arabia with MBS [Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman] at the end of last year. I know how important it is to normalise relations between Israel and its neighbours. ...

Sammy Wilson (DUP): ... The UK should neither dictate to Israel nor demand restrictions on how it retaliates against the Iranian regime, which has shown that it is prepared to take action to back up its threats to wipe out Israel. ...

col 36 **The Prime Minister:** We have already sanctioned more than 400 Iranian individuals and ... are discussing with our allies what more we can do.

Jason McCartney (Conservative): ... A flood of aid is going into Gaza to help the humanitarian efforts there. We all want to see an end to the bloodshed. ... what we saw over the weekend shows the importance of investing in air defence systems to defend civilians from hostile regimes.

The Prime Minister: ... it is a key capability that we need to invest in ...

Afzal Khan (Labour): Twelve-year-old Zain Arouq miraculously survived Israel's bombing that killed most of his family in Gaza three months ago, but he was killed this weekend by an aid airdrop when he was searching for scraps of food because the parachute did not open. Zain and thousands of others would still be alive had allies like the UK and the US pushed Israel to adhere to the UN resolution on a ceasefire in Gaza ...

The Prime Minister: I have been very clear that too many civilians have already lost their lives in Gaza. The UN Security Council resolution also called for the unconditional release of the hostages, which, as the hon. Gentleman will know, Hamas rejected at the weekend. ...

Stephen Crabb (Conservative): There is one thing right now that would do more than anything to help end the conflict in Gaza: the release of all the Israeli hostages being held by Hamas. Does my right hon. Friend agree that no matter how well intentioned and no matter how much we all want the conflict to end as soon as possible, simply calling for an unconditional immediate ceasefire reduces the incentive on Hamas to do the hostage deal? ...

The Prime Minister: ... It is absolutely crucial that, as part of the immediate humanitarian pause that we are calling for, not only can we get considerably more aid into Gaza to alleviate the suffering that people are experiencing, but we must be able to release the hostages. ...

col 37 **Marsha De Cordova (Labour):** While globally the attention is rightly focused on Israel and Iran, and we are all in agreement that the next step has to be de-escalation, the situation in Gaza is worsening every day. ... The UK almost stands alone in not restoring funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. Will the Prime Minister tell us when he will set out a clear path for funding to resume?

The Prime Minister: Together with our allies, we are reviewing the interim findings and are discussing appropriate next steps. ...

Mark Logan (Conservative): ... What discussions does the Prime Minister plan on having with his counterpart, Xi Jinping, and with Foreign Minister Wang Yi on resolving an escalation in the conflict in Iran?

The Prime Minister: ... we are discussing with our G7 partners and allies what further measures we can take to deal with the threat, economically, that Iran poses.

Naz Shah (Labour): Much has been said by the Prime Minister and other Conservative Members about the normalisation process between Saudi Arabia and Israel. On 9 January, the Saudi ambassador to the United Kingdom told Radio 4 that that normalisation process was subject to a two-state solution and a fully recognised Palestine.

... I remind the Prime Minister that support for any nation is not like the unconditional support that he has for his football team. When Iran acts like a rogue state in Syria, we rightly call it out and, when Israel taunts Iran by bombing its consulate building, knowing full well that Iran will respond and risking further escalation, we must call it out as well. ...

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to my statement ...

col 38 **Jeremy Wright (Conservative):** ... it is right and lawful to defend yourself and right and lawful for your allies to help to defend you, but does [the Prime Minister] agree that it is also important to point out that self-defence can be both effective and restrained, and furthermore that self-defence can be more effective in the long run when it is restrained ...

The Prime Minister: ... Ultimately, Israel does have a right to self-defence, as any state does. However, it has successfully repelled the Iranian attack and Iran is even more isolated on the world stage, which is why, as the Foreign Secretary said, we would urge it to take the win and avoid further escalation at this moment. ...

col 39 **Joanna Cherry (SNP):** ... just as Iran must be held to the standards of international law, so must Israel. ...

Vicky Ford (Conservative): Iranian drones have not only been fired towards Israel and Ukraine; there are also biweekly shipments of Iranian drones arriving in Port Sudan for use in the war in Sudan ... given that Iranian weapons are now being used in wars in the middle east, Europe and Africa, does [the Prime Minister] agree that partners not only in the west but in the global south should be deeply worried about how far the tentacles of terror from Tehran are now reaching?

The Prime Minister: I agree ...

Khalid Mahmood (Labour): I deplore the attack by the IDF on the consulate in Syria, and I totally deplore the massive attack by Iran, which launched 301 drones and missiles towards Israel. Iran knew full well that this attack would detract from the great work that we need to do in Gaza to support people who are starving and young children who are suffering from malnutrition. ...

The Prime Minister: ... we have urged de-escalation and calm heads to prevail ...

col 40 **Theresa Villiers (Conservative):** ... In the light of the horrific aggression from Iran, will the Prime Minister take the opportunity to confirm that there is no backsliding and that the UK stands shoulder to shoulder with Israel as it exercises its right to defend itself from a genocidal attack?

The Prime Minister: As I made crystal clear in my statement, we must ensure Israel's security. It is a non-negotiable and fundamental condition for peace in the region. In the face of threats like we saw this weekend, Israel will always have our full support.

Caroline Lucas (Green): Like the whole House, I condemn the attack on Israel by the tyrannical Iranian regime, just as I deeply condemn the atrocities of Hamas, but I am also incredibly concerned that our Prime Minister has now pitched the UK into a perilous war—and in support of an Israeli Government presided over by Netanyahu, a man who chose to bomb an Iranian embassy because he is dependent on his hard-right provocateurs. ...

col 41 **The Prime Minister:** We have called for an immediate humanitarian pause to get the hostages out and aid in, and we will continue to do so. I am completely comfortable that what we did over the weekend was the right thing, acting together with allies to make sure that we could act in defence of Israel in the face of an unprecedented attack on its territory and people.

Alec Shelbrooke (Conservative): ... Does [the Prime Minister] agree that, in order to try to achieve a sustainable ceasefire, the middle east has to confront the threat that Iran makes? ...

The Prime Minister: ... That is why the UK, together with our allies, stood up to take action ... and are currently engaged in the multinational Operation Prosperity Guardian to further deter Houthi and Iranian aggression.

Stephen Timms (Labour): I welcome the support of the Prime Minister and the Government for the resolution on Gaza adopted recently by the United Nations Security Council. Israel is currently in breach of that resolution. How does that affect the Prime Minister's view of the current actions of Israel in the middle east?

The Prime Minister: That resolution also calls for the release of the hostages, which Hamas rejected just this weekend.

David Jones (Conservative): ... Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps not only is the principal sponsor of terrorism in the middle east, but is active on the streets of the United Kingdom. ... While I fully understand that my right hon. Friend will not flag up any such action in advance, can he confirm that he will take into account what I believe to be the overwhelming feeling in this House, which is that the IRGC should be proscribed as a terrorist organisation?

col 42 **The Prime Minister:** ... the National Security Act 2023 creates new offences that give us the powers to arrest and detain people suspected of involvement in

state threats on our soil.

Emma Lewell-Buck (Labour): I share the hope for calm and de-escalation. The UN Secretary-General has said that, without it, the middle east faces “a real danger of a devastating full-scale conflict”.

Can the Prime Minister tell us what the parameters are of UK military involvement in the region, and confirm that it will remain defensive?

The Prime Minister: I am not going to speculate on hypotheticals. ...

Nicola Richards (Conservative): Iran has smuggled arms into the middle east, including the west bank. It has equipped, funded and trained Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis, as well as threatened British-Iranians on British soil—and that does not even include what Iran has done to its own people, not least gassing Iranian schoolgirls. ...

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to highlight Iran’s influence ... We will continue to be vigilant in the area.

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat): ... When [the Prime Minister] speaks to Prime Minister Netanyahu, will he make it clear to him that if Israel were now to proceed with its much-anticipated attack on Rafah, it would be not only a humanitarian catastrophe for the 1.5 million Palestinians who are sheltering there and make the release of the hostages more difficult, but make that stability and de-escalation more difficult to achieve and, as a consequence, would not have the support of this Government?

The Prime Minister: We have repeatedly raised humanitarian concerns with the Israeli Government. ...

col 43 **Seema Malhotra (Labour Co-op):** The core issue now must be de-escalation, an immediate ceasefire on all sides to end the devastating situation in Gaza, and a political solution for the long term. UNRWA is arguably the single biggest multilateral tool to support a political solution, and it is unmatched in its administrative ability to deliver aid. The UK stands behind other countries in not renewing funding to UNRWA. ...

The Prime Minister: ... I do not think it is right to say that we are behind other countries. We are in active dialogue with other countries on the approach to UNRWA. We recognise the operational and logistical role it plays on the ground while recognising the very shocking concerns that we all had about what happened previously. It is right that we take the time to get our future approach to UNRWA right. ...

col 44 **Jane Hunt (Conservative):** ... what more can the UK do to help bring peace to the region?

The Prime Minister: ... First and foremost, we have to be resolute in protecting regional security and standing up for Israel when situations such as this happen. Secondly, we have to be committed to a two-state solution, and we are doing everything we can to bring that about ... Thirdly, we must see an immediate humanitarian pause in Gaza, so that we can get the hostages out and aid in. ...

col 45 **Andy McDonald (Labour):** ... a nation state’s capacity to observe international humanitarian law is quite different from its actually doing so. ... all people are entitled to security and peace, but sadly for the people of Gaza the calls for restraint have not worked. What additional options is he considering? ...

The Prime Minister: It is important that the hostages are released ... it was Hamas, yet again this weekend, who rejected the latest round of negotiations to get those hostages back to safety. ...

Jack Lopresti (Conservative): ... Given this despicable attack on the civilian population of Israel by Iran, does he agree with me that the world cannot risk a nuclear-armed Iran? Will he commit to supporting whatever it takes, including not taking military action off the table, to ensure that that nightmare never happens?

The Prime Minister: As I have said, there is no credible civilian justification for the enrichment levels we have seen ... We are committed to using all diplomatic tools to ensure that Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon ...

Neale Hanvey (Alba): ... I welcome the Prime Minister's call for de-escalation and restraint, but I cannot be the only person who wonders where those calls for de-escalation and restraint were six months ago. ...

The Prime Minister: We have continued to call on the Israeli Government to do everything they can to protect civilian life, as they exercise their right and duty to ensure security for citizens. ...

col 46 **Bob Blackman (Conservative):** Over the weekend Iran effectively declared war on our friend and ally, Israel. When the Prime Minister talks to Prime Minister Netanyahu, he will have to be very careful about how he persuades him to exercise self-restraint. ...

The Prime Minister: We have already sanctioned over 400 different Iranian individuals and entities, including the IRGC in its entirety. ...

Alex Davies-Jones (Labour): ... it was once again Hamas who rejected a US-brokered deal that would see the fighting stop, the release of hostages and allow far more aid into Gaza. What pressure is the Government applying to our allies in the region who provide support to Hamas, to urge them to do all they can to make Hamas accept a deal?

The Prime Minister: ... We are doing everything we can talking to allies in the region to put pressure on Hamas to accept a deal and get the hostages released. ...

Steve Double (Conservative): ... As a beacon of liberal democracy in the region, Israel's security is our security. It is clear that serious loss of life was avoided at the weekend only because of the effectiveness of Israeli defence mechanisms, supported by the UK and others. Does the Prime Minister share my concern that those calling for an arms embargo against Israel are not only misguided, but risk weakening Israel's ability to defend itself and encouraging those who wish Israel harm?

The Prime Minister: As I have said, we stand by Israel's right to defend itself. It is important that it continues to abide by international humanitarian law ...

Anum Qaisar (SNP): ... Does the Prime Minister accept that proportionality is key and must include the conduct of all parties, including the 192 days of uninterrupted and constant bombardment of Gaza in response to what was, of course, a horrific attack by Hamas? ...

The Prime Minister: We continue to support Israel's right to defend itself and ensure security for its citizens. It must do that in accordance with international humanitarian law...

col 47 **Greg Smith (Conservative):** ... in order to live in safety and security, the first and most pressing mission for Israel continues to be the necessity of defeating Hamas ...

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the threat that Hamas pose to the security and safety of the people of Israel. ...

Andy Slaughter (Labour): The Prime Minister rightly calls for restraint and de-escalation in the middle east, but is there not more chance that his words will carry weight if a ceasefire is advocated for all sides, including the warring parties in Gaza?

The Prime Minister: We have called for an immediate humanitarian pause in Gaza, so that hostages can be released and aid can go in ...

Anna Firth (Conservative): ... Iran is the dangerous and destabilising player in this region, whether by itself directly or through its proxies. It is also a despotic, medieval regime...

The Prime Minister: Iran's human rights record remains completely unacceptable. We have sanctioned almost 100 entities and individuals specifically for human rights violations. ...

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): Thirty-three thousand people have died in Gaza. More bombs have been dropped there than were dropped in the whole of the Iraq war. This weekend's horrific events show the danger of a war escalating across the whole region. Does the Prime Minister recognise that the kernel of the whole issue across the region is the continued Israeli occupation of Palestine? ...

col 48 **The Prime Minister:** Of course we want to see, and remain committed to, a

two-state solution, and we are working hard to bring that about, but the biggest cause of regional instability is the pernicious influence of Iran, and nobody else.

Kieran Mullan (Conservative): Does the Prime Minister agree that even those who want to link the conflict between Israel and Hamas with the conduct of this attack have to recognise that, since its inception decades ago, the Islamic Republic of Iran has sought the destruction not only of our way of life, but of Israel and its people ...

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right ...

Andrew Gwynne (Labour): ... I was interested in what the Prime Minister said about the diplomatic efforts over the past six months, with the Palestinian Authority looking towards a two-state solution. Given that the issues are settlements, water and access between Gaza and the west bank and Jerusalem, what window of opportunity does he think there is with the Netanyahu Government to get all parties round the table?

The Prime Minister: That is something that we continually push for. In the meantime, we also focus on building up the technical and administrative capability of the Palestinian Authority, so that they are in a position to provide effective and strong governance for the west bank and Gaza ...

Janet Daby (Labour): Yesterday, the United Nations Secretary-General said: "The Middle East is on the brink. The people of the region are confronting a real danger of a devastating full-scale conflict. Now is the time to defuse and de-escalate". Does the Prime Minister agree with the Secretary-General ...

The Prime Minister: Of course we want to avoid further escalation and bloodshed ...

Barry Gardiner (Labour): Iran sought to justify its unjustifiable attack on Israel on the basis that it was retaliating for Israel's attack on its consulate. ... the Prime Minister said that in his telephone conversation with Prime Minister Netanyahu later today, he will urge de-escalation. ... will he set out the measures that the UK will take if, in fact, Israel seeks to retaliate further?

The Prime Minister: I am not going to comment on hypotheticals ...

col 49 **Beth Winter (Labour):** ... At the Security Council last night, the UN Secretary-General warned of "devastating full-scale conflict" and called for de-escalation and maximum restraint. Today, the Foreign Secretary said in response that there could have been "thousands of casualties" and pressure for an escalation of this conflict. Does the Prime Minister agree with that, and does he also agree that the very real tens of thousands of deaths and casualties that Israel's military attacks and imposed famine conditions have caused in Gaza are drivers of regional instability?

The Prime Minister: We want to avoid further escalation and bloodshed, which would be deeply destabilising for the region and would risk more lives. ...

Alison Thewliss (SNP): My constituent Sama has been trying to get her mother, father and brother out of Gaza since this conflict began. They have been displaced multiple times, and they are now in a tent in Rafah. They cannot apply to come to the UK for safety, as there is no scheme. This is in the UK Government's hands, and they could waive the need for biometrics, if they so decided. ...

The Prime Minister: ... I am sure that if she writes to the Home Office, it will be happy to look into it for her.

Mohammad Yasin (Labour): Four former UK Supreme Court judges and more than 600 lawyers, including over 60 KCs, have warned the Prime Minister that the UK risks breaking international law relating to a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza if it does not stop its weapons exports to Israel. ...

The Prime Minister: ... We have a very robust and rigorous export licensing regime. The Foreign Secretary confirmed last week that the UK's position on export licences is unchanged following the latest assessment, and is in line with the legal advice. ...

Debbie Abrahams (Labour): ... Will [the Prime Minister] also confirm that the UK will not

take part in any offensive action of Israel's?

The Prime Minister: We acted in a defensive capacity, and we are discussing with

G7 allies further diplomatic measures that can be taken in a co-ordinated fashion.

col 50 **Stephen Farry (Alliance):** ... surely there must be honesty and transparency about the fact that Israel itself is a threat to stability, and has already systematically broken international humanitarian law. The Government have no reluctance to rightly challenge Russia over Ukraine in that regard; why the reluctance in relation to Israel ...

The Prime Minister: As I said, I do not think there is any equivalence between what Vladimir Putin is doing in Ukraine and what Israel is doing to ensure the security of its citizens in the face of an appalling terrorist attack.

Christian Wakeford (Labour): It has been over 15 months since it was reported that proscription of the IRGC was imminent. Since then, Iran has continued to fund and supply Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis. ...

The Prime Minister: ... the police, security services and courts all have the tools that they need to sanction, prosecute and mitigate the threats from Iran. ...

Helen Hayes (Labour): ... The organisational infrastructure of UNRWA is unparalleled and cannot be replicated. A further delay on the part of the UK Government will cost further lives, in a context in which famine is taking hold. ...

The Prime Minister: I know that the whole House will have rightly been appalled by the allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in 7 October. We want UNRWA to give detailed undertakings about changes in personnel policy and procedures to ensure that nothing like that can ever happen again. ...

Brendan O'Hara (SNP): Israel has indicated that it intends to respond to Iran's attack, against the advice of the international community ... Such a retaliation could tip the region into a catastrophic all-out war, so in terms of leverage to persuade Prime Minister Netanyahu against further retaliation, will the right hon. Gentleman say that, should Israel choose to escalate, there will be no further UK military support for its endeavours in this conflict?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman meant also to condemn Iran for what happened over the weekend. ...

col 51 **Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour):** ... It is a matter of principle that diplomatic premises are not targeted, so will the Prime Minister confirm what conversations he has had with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu about the attack on the Iranian consulate in Syria ...

The Prime Minister: ... As the Foreign Secretary said this morning, we urge Israel in particular to recognise that it has successfully repelled the Iranian attacks, and that Iran is ever more isolated on the world stage.

Kerry McCarthy (Labour): Jacqui, the mother of murdered aid worker James Kirby, is my constituent. ... There is a real danger—I am already seeing this, as events move on—that his death will end up being chalked up as collateral damage in this conflict. Will the Prime Minister show that he understands the family's need to see justice done ...

The Prime Minister: My condolences to Jacqui and the families of all those who were tragically killed as they delivered aid. As I said, they were heroes and they absolutely deserve our admiration. ... there needs to be a considerable improvement in the deconfliction mechanisms between Israel and aid agencies. ...

Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat): ... Can the Prime Minister assure us that when he speaks to the Prime Minister of Israel later today, he will impress upon him not only the need for restraint to restabilise the region, but the unique opportunity he has now to take steps towards peace by promoting a ceasefire and allowing aid into Gaza?

The Prime Minister: ... we continue to want to see an immediate humanitarian pause so that hostages are released and aid goes in, and we want Israel to immediately deliver on its commitments to significantly increase the amount of aid getting into Gaza through the various measures it has set out.

col 52 Toby Perkins (Labour): ... there is much more we could be doing to undermine the murderous Iranian regime. Simultaneously, the way that Israel continues to ignore the United Nations resolution is deeply troubling. ...

The Prime Minister: ... the UK is leading with allies, defending our values and our interests, and standing together with our friends to bring about regional security. ...

Rupa Huq (Labour): Iran's reckless actions only add more fuel to an already raging fire ...

Emma Hardy (Labour): ... the Prime Minister said that he would take the time to set the right future approach to UNRWA. As the famine continues, I wonder how much time the Prime Minister needs before he makes up his mind to restore funding and get aid to the people who need it.

The Prime Minister: What the hon. Lady failed to mention was the shocking allegations of people involved in UNRWA also being involved in the massacre on 7 October. ... The final reports, which have been commissioned, are due at the end of April. We are already in dialogue with our partners; once we review those reports, we will set out our future approach, but that is not to say that we are not already doing an enormous amount to bring more aid into the region. ...

Claudia Webbe (Independent): The action of the Royal Air Force in shooting down Iranian drones and cruise missiles heading to, and over, Israel over the weekend raises a very serious question. Since the UK is clearly capable of acting to prevent air strikes in the region, and both the International Court of Justice and the UN special rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories have implicated Israel in a genocide in Gaza, why are the Government not interested in fulfilling their obligations under international law by protecting Palestinian women and children from Israeli airstrikes? Why are the Government not acting to prevent the killing of Palestinians?

The Prime Minister: ... While, of course, we respect the role and the independence of the ICJ, our view is that Israel's actions in Gaza can simply not be described as a genocide ...

col 53 Matt Western (Labour): ... With the deaths of those three UK charity workers, working for World Central Kitchen, will the Prime Minister confirm whether he has received a written apology from the Prime Minister of Israel?

The Prime Minister: I spoke explicitly to the Prime Minister of Israel, who did that when I spoke to him the very next day. ... We are pleased to see the early suspension of two officers involved; now what we need is reform of Israel's deconfliction mechanism to ensure the future safety of aid workers.

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op): ... Should the Prime Minister of Israel say that he will further assault Gaza or impede aid, will the Prime Minister action that restraint and call for an immediate ceasefire?

The Prime Minister: We have already called for an immediate humanitarian pause so that more aid can get in and hostages can be released. ...

Alan Brown (SNP): Over 33,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, including 14,000 children. Some 76,000 civilians have been injured or maimed and 700 healthcare and aid workers have been killed. There is an ongoing famine, and the UK Government under the Prime Minister's watch are now trying to find ways around the Israeli blockade that is preventing aid from getting in; is that not in itself an admission that the ongoing Israeli actions are disproportionate, and should we not be calling them out as such?

The Prime Minister: We have been consistently clear that we are concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. ...

Kim Johnson (Labour): ... The Prime Minister has talked about diplomatic action towards a two-state solution. Can he say what action he is taking against the far-right Ministers in the Israeli Government who are opposed to a two-state solution?

The Prime Minister: We have been very clear that our view is that we should have a two-state solution, and we are making sure we do everything we can to contribute to that aim.

col 54 **Michael Shanks (Labour):** ... the Prime Minister said that he has received the interim report on UNRWA and that in due course he will receive the final report. Will he publish the interim report, and if not, why not? ...

The Prime Minister: When it comes to UNRWA, it is the UN that is publishing the expected final reports towards the end of April. ...

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... does the Prime Minister agree that Hamas and the IRGC can be likened to cancer, and that to save life throughout the middle east and to retain stability the cancer of Hamas and the IRGC needs to be removed urgently by all means necessary?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out the destabilising impact of Iran across the region, including action through proxies such as Hamas, the Houthis and others, and we will do everything we can to counter that threat.

Richard Foord (Liberal Democrat): ... When the Government deployed the RAF to defend civilians in Libya, a full parliamentary debate was held afterwards and a vote was granted to Members of this House. ... Will the Government grant Members a full debate and a vote on British military action, even after the action has happened?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not believe that is necessary. I am obviously here answering questions. ... it was right that we moved quickly to respond to an immediate and dangerous threat. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-15/debates/5B1C3E28-F71B-4513-B1D8-54205AF8D464/Iran-IsraelUpdate>

The G7 statement referred to above by the Prime Minister can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/g7-statement-on-irans-attack-against-israel-14-april-2024>

The Foreign Secretary's comment referred to above by the Prime Minister can be heard at

<https://twitter.com/GMB/status/1779777686539214897>

Alicia Kearn's claims referred to above by Zarah Sultana can be heard at

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/30/uk-government-lawyers-say-israel-is-breaking-international-law-claims-top-tory-in-leaked-recording>

The UN Secretary-General's comment referred to above by Richard Burgon, Emma Lewell-Buck, Janet Daby, and Beth Winter can be read at

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22188.doc.htm>

The UN Security Council Resolution referred to above by Stephen Timms can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728\(2024\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728(2024))

The National Security Act 2023, referred to above by the Prime Minister, can be read at

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/32/contents>

The warning referred to above by Mohammad Yasin can be read at

<https://lawyersletter.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Gaza-letter-FIN-3-April.pdf>

House of Lords Ministerial Statement and Q&A

Iran and Israel

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

col 837 **Baroness Smith of Basildon (Labour):** ... Iran's actions over the weekend have, as Keir Starmer said in the other place, "left the world a more dangerous place".

There was clear intent to destabilise the region and fuel further tensions. Innocent civilians were targeted. It is right that these actions were swiftly condemned by the Prime Minister, the leader of the Opposition and much of the international community. We endorse the Prime Minister's calls for restraint.

We also acknowledge the professionalism and bravery of our Armed Forces ...

The repelling of Iran's attack against Israel is important for several reasons. First, lives were saved, as 99% of the drones and missiles were intercepted. The attack failed. Secondly, Israel acted with strength and courage. Thirdly, the success of that defensive action gives hope that, with political will from the relevant parties, and with diplomatic support from partners, escalation can be avoided. ...

col 838 Britain is resolute in our support for the collective security of Israel, Jordan and other partners in the region, and we urge every nation to proceed with restraint. The Prime Minister's Statement is clear that, although the Middle East is thousands of miles away, it has a direct impact here at home, and we want to do all we can to prevent further bloodshed and conflict. ...

I do not know if the noble Lord the Lord Privy Seal can today say more about what actions might be expected in the coming days, given the urgency of the situation now faced. Can he confirm that the Government agree that, as a matter of principle, diplomatic premises must not be targeted and attacked?

With the Iranian regime sponsoring terrorism across the region and beyond ... are additional sanctions being planned? ...

Are the Government now considering proscribing the IRGC? ...

Given Iran's use of drones in the attack against Israel, what steps are we and our international partners taking to prevent the regime accessing western-made components? We do not accept that there is justification at all for Iran's attack on Israel, but we acknowledge the role that the ongoing war in Gaza has in driving regional tensions. We are now more than six months on from the dreadful Hamas terror attack, yet hostages remain separated from their families and thousands of innocent Palestinians have been killed or wounded. Many more have been displaced and more than a million people are on the brink of famine.

... could [the Lord Privy Seal] outline what additional diplomatic and practical steps the Foreign Secretary and others are taking to ensure a continued scaling up of aid provision? ...

Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have spoken of support to the Palestinian Authority. Can the Lord Privy Seal outline what form that is likely to take ...

col 839 **Lord Newby (Liberal Democrat):** ... We ... support the Government's priority, at this point, of seeking to de-escalate the situation and prevent further bloodshed. There is nothing to be gained by further retaliation on either side. ...

Has there been any increase in Houthi attacks in parallel with the Iranian strikes on Saturday? ...

It is of course right to seek a two-state solution for the benefit of both the Palestinian and Israeli people, but also for the stability that it would help bring to the wider region. ...

It is depressing that it has so far proved impossible to negotiate a ceasefire in Gaza. Of course, we support all attempts to do so. In the meantime, the threat of famine continues to increase. Food shipments are also increasing, but at nowhere near a level to meet needs. Will the Government keep up the pressure to open up the additional routes by land and via Ashdod which the Israeli Government have promised, but which have so far failed to materialise, so that the threat of famine can finally be lifted? ...

col 840 ... we could finally proscribe the Iranian Revolutionary Guard—a sponsor of terrorism across the region—as a terrorist organisation. Will the Government now do so? ...

After Saturday's attack, the prospect of a lasting peace in the Middle East looks further away than ever. For the UK, this must simply mean that our efforts to try to reach one are redoubled. ...

Lord True (The Lord Privy Seal): ... one of the few encouraging aspects thus far is that it is clear that the Iranian action, unjustified as it was, was a failure. This does not mean that its gravity can be in any way underestimated ... It must not be forgotten that this whole grievous episode started with a merciless lack of restraint

by the Hamas terrorists who burst into the homes of civilians and murdered women, children and old people in the most brutal and despicable manner. However much we deplore and rightly express concern about ongoing developments, we must never lose sight of the real naked horror of Hamas terrorism. ...

col 841 The IRGC has been involved in fomenting regional conflicts, violating human rights and terrorism. We have introduced a new Iran sanctions regime to give us more extensive power to designate, and the National Security Act ... implements new measures to protect the British public ...

The option of proscription of the IRGC obviously remains open to us, but the British Government's position remains that it is not helpful to speculate on whether a group is being considered for proscription. ...

We have expressed our full solidarity and support to Israel and its people, and the G7 reaffirmed its commitment to its security. ...

We will also strengthen our co-operation to seek to end the crisis in Gaza, working towards an immediate and sustainable ceasefire, the release of hostages by Hamas—something it refuses to do—and increased humanitarian aid to Palestinians in need. ...

Israel has committed to significant steps to increase the amount of aid getting to Gaza, including delivery of aid through the Port of Ashdod and the Erez checkpoint, increasing the number of aid trucks to at least 500 a day, increasing capacity through the Jordan land corridor, extending the opening hours of the Kerem Shalom crossing and approving more types of aid, including fuel to enable more bakeries to open and hospitals to function. ...

col 842 The UK is calling on Israel to make progress on the following additional action: a major change in the conduct of hostilities to protect civilians and reform of the deconfliction mechanism to ensure the safety of aid workers. ...

Lord Wolfson of Tredegar (Conservative): My Lords, on Saturday night, I experienced three emotions: fear, pride and hope—fear, because I have close family in Israel ... pride, when I heard that our planes, with their brave pilots, had taken part in protecting Israel from Iranian attacks; and hope, when I heard that the royal air force of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan had also participated. Does my noble friend agree with me that that last point is absolutely key? ...

col 843 **Lord True:** ... ultimately, this great region of the world, the cradle of human culture and so much of our spiritual and historic strength, needs peace. It needs people who wish for peace, and the vast majority in that part of the world crave peace. The evil people who wish to unleash violence are in a minority—and, unfortunately, in powerful positions in some places. ...

Baroness Smith of Newnham (Liberal Democrat): ... do we not need to think about ensuring that we are increasing our defence positions to support trade continuing and to support our allies in the Middle East? ...

col 844 **Baroness Deech (Crossbench):** ... First, in relation to Gaza, it must not be forgotten that this is happening against a history of nearly two millennia of persecution. There is no other people in the world who have been persecuted for so long and against whom there is a constant existential threat. Therefore, the priority in Gaza must be for Hamas to come out of the tunnels and hospitals and release the hostages if they have them, and then you get your ceasefire.

Secondly ... Iran is within minutes of getting nuclear capability and is mad enough to use it. We must return to sanctions. ...

Lord True: ... As a historian and someone with a sensitivity to all the genius of human culture, of course I understand what she says about the experience of the Jewish people. It is clear that Hamas cannot remain in charge in Gaza: the British Government have made that clear ...

On her important remarks on Iranian nuclear ambitions—if there be such, and the

objective observer suggests that there might be—there is no credible civilian justification for enrichment at the levels that the IAEA has reported in Iran. The British Government remain determined that Iran must never develop a nuclear weapon. ...

col 845 Lord Moore of Etchingam (Non-affiliated): ... I wonder whether protesting against the idea of escalation does not come a bit too easily to the lips of Israel's allies. Should the Government not reflect that, if you were in Tehran today, you might be quite pleased that the immediate reaction of the western allies is to call for Israel to restrain itself, when Israel is not the problem. ...

Lord True: ... one must not forget where this whole matter began with the most atrocious eruption by terrorists into private and peaceful civilian life. The Government are absolutely clear that threats to destroy what some term the Zionist entity, the State of Israel, are wholly unacceptable and unforgivable, and can be no basis for any way of going forward to a long-term peaceful solution. ...

Lord Polak (Conservative): ... A *Jewish Chronicle* investigation by journalist David Rose revealed that academics at a dozen UK universities were working alongside Iranian counterparts on drone research. As a result, on 23 June 2023—10 months ago—the Prime Minister announced an inquiry into these allegations that scientists at British universities have been helping Iran develop technology that could be used to upgrade its suicide drone programme. In light of the appalling Iranian attack on Israel, can I ask the Lord Privy Seal to write to me urgently with an update on this inquiry?

Lord True: Yes, I will do so. ...

On UK universities, it is true that it appears that there has been co-operation on drone technology. ...

We will not accept collaborations that compromise our national security. We have made our systems more robust, expanded the scope of the academic technology approval scheme to protect research from ever-changing global threats and refused applications where we have had concerns. ...

col 846 Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Labour): ... what consideration has been given by the UK Government to having immediate discussions with the Iranian ambassador in the UK to de-escalate tensions and get back to a situation in which we can forge peace, prosperity and an end to violence, particularly in Gaza. ...

Lord True: My Lords, the Foreign Secretary spoke yesterday to both the Israeli and Iranian Foreign Secretaries. He expressed to both the United Kingdom's continuing support for Israel and condemnation of the Iranian attack. ...

Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat): ...we have had lots of assurances that aid will be allowed in [to Gaza] but very little action, and given that this is fuelling instability in the region, made worse by attacks on Palestinian villages in the West Bank, could the UK Government perhaps make some conditions on their unequivocal support for Israel? ...

Lord True: ... the fundamental truth is that the Israeli Government have sought to deconflict wherever possible in relation to civilians, which is very hard in this brutal situation. It is the position of the British Government that Israel has every right to defend itself against the kinds of attacks that it has had and the further attack it had at the weekend.

Of course we wish to see restraint, but one simple step could be taken: Hamas could lay down its arms, drop its evil propaganda calling for the destruction of Israel and the killing of Jews, get out of Gaza and let the Palestinian people get on with their lives.

col 847 Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston (Crossbench): ... One of the things ... is the ability to distribute the aid that is going in. ... it is going in, and there is some responsibility on Hamas to allow that aid to be properly distributed. Will the noble Lord assure the House that we are taking steps such that the aid that is going in should be recognised and that the conditions of hostage release have to be associated with any negotiations of a

ceasefire and further support going in?

Lord True: I agree with the noble Baroness on the continued holding of hostages. It is never justifiable to take or hold hostages. I repeat that Hamas can end this by taking a whole series of actions. Interfering with, and indeed seeking to abscond with, aid is equally unacceptable. Obviously, we make every effort through our counterparties to ensure that that does not happen, but Hamas' activities do not make the delivery of humanitarian aid easy.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Conservative): My Lords, I try to think of how I would feel about being told to exercise restraint, if I were living in Israel at the present time and had been subject to this attack, knowing that this evil regime, which has now come out into the light, supported these vile groups that were responsible for 7 October and other attacks. ... no one in Israel can sleep safe in their bed at night knowing that this regime might have the capability of developing nuclear weapons. ...

Lord True: ... There is a wound there which cannot be removed, but ultimately we have to find a way for wounds to heal. They cannot heal while the kinds of actions being taken by Iran continue. ...

col 849 Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green): ... the Statement makes no reference to the Israeli attack on the Iranian embassy in Syria. ... Can the noble Lord reassure me that the Government are stressing to Israel the need to avoid escalatory actions, given the perilous current state of the region?

Lord True: My Lords, it was not actually an attack on the Iranian embassy in Syria. ... the people who were caught in Syria, in whatever way we would like to describe it, were involved actively in warlike activities against the State of Israel and were encouraging terrorism. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-04-15/debates/F3D19E15-AE9F-424E-A6F3-67A87F68C37F/IranAndIsrael>

Keir Starmer's comment referred to above by Baroness Smith of Basildon can be read at
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-15/debates/5B1C3E28-F71B-4513-B1D8-54205AF8D464/Iran-IsraelUpdate#contribution-BE88FFAB-502C-4978-A5F2-7B1B2D1A30B1>

The National Security Act, referred to above by Lord True, can be read at
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/32/contents>

The G7 affirmation, referred to above by Lord True, can be read at
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/g7-statement-on-irans-attack-against-israel-14-april-2024>

The Jewish Chronicle report referred to above by Lord Polak can be read at
<https://www.thejc.com/news/irans-suicide-drones-are-being-developed-at-british-universities-jbt3d17x>

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel Defense Forces: British Nationals Abroad

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [20752] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department issues guidance to UK nationals on volunteering with the Israeli Defence Force.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK recognises the right of British nationals with more than one nationality to serve in the legitimately recognised armed forces of their additional nationalities. This includes the Israel Defence Force.

Our travel advice for those considering travel to all countries, including Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, is updated regularly and available online.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20752>

The travel advice referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

and

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

Israel: Arms Trade

Dan Carden (Labour) [20762] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which arms export licences are for end-use by Israeli (a) military and (b) security forces.

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

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

The most recent Official Statistics cover the period 1 April - 30 June 2023.

Information regarding export licensing decisions made between 1 October - 31 December 2023 will be published after April 2024 and information regarding export licensing decisions made between 1 January - 31 March 2024 will be published later this year.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20762>

Israel: Arms Trade

Philippa Whitford (SNP) [20655] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of suspending the Government's (a) trade agreements and (b) arms licenses with Israel.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK's strategic partnership with Israel includes trade. As the Secretary of State for Business and Trade told the House on 7 March, Israel remains a part of the FTA programme, negotiations continue, and she has recently discussed with the Israeli Minister of Economy our existing trading relationship as well as how Israel is managing the challenges of working on an FTA while fighting a war.

All export license applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20655>

The Memorandum of Understanding on the Strategic Partnership referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-israel-strategic-partnership-memorandum-of-understanding-2021/memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-israel-and-the-uk-foreign-commonwealth-development-office-on-the-uk-israel-s>

The Minister's comments referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-07/debates/6421D075-8CD3-479E-BF4B-AB3EAA5FE18F/FreeTradeAgreementNegotiationsIsrael#contribution-9DFD2FEA-7FEB-426E-9869-2E4642D9348F>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Official Visits

Richard Burgon (Labour) [20082] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, how many foreign officials have been granted special mission status to visit the UK in each year since 2011; and if he will list the (a) names and (b) country of origin of those officials.

David Rutley: As set out in 2013 by the former Foreign Secretary William Hague,

a special mission is a 'temporary mission, representing a state, which is sent by one state to another with the consent of the latter, in order to carry out official engagements on behalf of the sending state'. Since starting to issue special mission status (SMS) certificates in 2013, the FCDO has given consent for 57 special mission status visits to the UK for the following officials and their delegations:

2013	Israel	Maj. Gen. (res) Amos Yadlin, Former Chief of Military Intelligence DMI; Deputy Commander of Air Force
		Maj. Gen. (res) Doron Almog Senior Adviser on Beduoin Issues (cancelled)
		Lt. Gen. Benjamin Gantz, Chief of Defence Staff, Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)
		Dr. Yuval Steinitz, Minister of International Affairs, Strategy and Intelligence
2014	Egypt	Dr. Mohamed Mahmoud Abdul Nasr, Minister of Education (cancelled)
		Mr Mounir Faqhry Abdel Noor, Minister for Foreign Trade and Investment
		Ambassador Yasser Atef, Deputy Assistant Minister for European Affairs
		Dr Sherif Mohamed Ali Hammad, Minister of Scientific Research
		Lt. Gen. Mahmoud Hegazy, Chief of Staff of Egyptian Armed Forces
		Mr Sameh Shoukry, Minister for Foreign Affairs
		Dr Mahamoud Aboel Nasr, Minister of Education
	Israel	Ms Tzipi Livni, Minister for Justice
		Ms Tzipi Livni, Minister for Justice
	Iran	Mr Ebrahim Rahimpour, Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Oceania
2015	Egypt	Dr Mahmoud Abdoul Nasr, Minister of Education
		Mr Ashraf Salman, Minister of Investment
		Mr Ashraf Salman, Minister of Investment
		Dr Hany Kadry Demain, Minister of Finance
		Prof. Dr Sherif Hammad, Minister of Scientific Research
		Sheikh Dr Ahmed Al-Tayyeb, Grand Imam
		Mr Sameh Hassan Shoukry, Foreign Minister
		Lt. Gen. Mahmoud Hegazy, Chief of Defence Staff
		Mr Tarek Kabil, Minister of Trade and Industry
		Mj. Gen. Mohamed Elkeshky, Assistant to the Minister of Defence for International Relations
		Mr Khaled Fawzy, Chief of General Intelligence
		Dr Ahmed Emad Eldin Rady, Minister for Health
		President Sisi's Advance Delegation
		President Sisi's Delegation
		Major General Mohammad Farag Elshahat, Head of Military Intelligence
	Israel	Ms Tzipi Livni, Member of the Israeli Knessett
		Delegation of Former Security Officials
		Mr Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister

		Maj. Gen. Herzi Halevi, Chief of Military Intelligence
	Qatar	H.E, Dr. Ali bin Fetais Almarri, Attorney General
2016	Egypt	Mr Ashraf El Sheihy, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research
		Mr Saad Elgyoushi, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research
		Mr Sameh Hassan Shoukry, Foreign Minister
	Qatar	H.E, Dr. Ali bin Fetais Almarri, Attorney General.
	Israel	Ms Tzipi Livni, Member of the Israeli Knessett
		Maj. Gen. (ret) Amos Yadlin, Director, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)
		Mr Shaul Mofaz, Former CDS and Minister of Defence
		Mr Avi Dichter, Member of the Israeli Knessett
	Rwanda	Mr James Kararebe, Minister of Defence
2017	Egypt	Lt. Gen. Mahmoud Ibrahim Mahmoud Hegazy, Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces.
		Eng. Sherif Ismail, Prime Minister
		Mr Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs
2018	Saudi Arabia	Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia
2019	Egypt	Mr Mahmoud Sharawy, Minister of Local Development
		Mr Kamel El-Wazer, Minister of Transport
2020	Egypt	Mr Abdel Fattah Alsisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
		Mr Kamel El-Wazer, Minister of Transport
	Saudi Arabia	Colonal Turki Al Maliki, Coalition Spokesman and Joint Head of Delegation
2021	Egypt	Mr Kamel El-Wazer, Minister of Transport
2022	Egypt	Mr Kamel El-Wazer, Minister of Transport
		Mr Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs
	Saudi Arabia	Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. (cancelled)
2024	Israel	Mr Benny Gantz, Minister of the State of Israel

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-22/20082>

Hamas: Hostage Taking

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [20389] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent progress his Department has made on helping to secure the release of hostages in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK Government has been working with partners across the region to secure the release of hostages, including British nationals and their families.

We have been clear that the release of all the hostages is one of the vital elements for a lasting peace and the Foreign Secretary has reiterated that we want to see the safe release of all hostages unconditionally.

The Government continues to call for an immediate humanitarian pause now to allow for the release of hostages.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/20389>

Israel: Palestinians

Dan Carden (Labour) [20755] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 entitled Anatomy of a Genocide, published on 25 March 2024, A/HRC/55/73.

Andrew Mitchell: 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, but we also remain clear that formal determination of genocide should be based upon the final judgment of a competent court.

There must be a reduction in civilian casualties. All parties must act within International Humanitarian Law. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20755>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session55/advance-versions/a-hrc-55-73-auv.pdf>

Hamas: UNRWA

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [20286] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department holds information on whether the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has approved Hamas' use of its supplies and equipment.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK takes allegations of neutrality violations extremely seriously including reports of diversion of equipment. This is something we monitor in our annual assessment of UNRWA.

The UK is following closely the independent review led by Minister Catherine Colonna which is assessing the mechanisms and procedures that the Agency currently has in place to ensure neutrality.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/20286>

Hamas: UNRWA

Alan Brown (SNP) [20680] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 25 March 2024 to Question 19634 on Hamas: UNRWA, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the interim report on UNRWA neutrality policies and system.

Andrew Mitchell: We are aware that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Catherine Colonna have now provided their interim reports to the UN Secretary-General.

We want UNRWA to give detailed undertakings about changes in personnel, policy and precedents to ensure this can never happen again.

We are working with allies to try to bring this situation to a rapid conclusion - not least because UNRWA has a vital role to play in providing aid and services in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20680>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-20/19634>

Gaza: UNRWA

Greg Smith (Conservative) [20438] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had discussions with (a) relevant stakeholders and (b) his international counterparts on reported terror activity within and near United

Nations Works and Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) facilities in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK takes allegations of neutrality violations extremely seriously, including any incidents related to UN installations. The FCDO also monitors this closely through our annual assessment of UNRWA. When violations have been identified, UNRWA has taken action, including raising the issue with relevant parties.

We are aware that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Catherine Colonna have now provided their interim reports to the UN Secretary-General. Their independent investigations include assessment of the policies and systems UNRWA has in place to ensure neutrality.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/20438>

UNRWA: Finance

Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru) [20201] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether the Government plans to resume funding for UNRWA following the decisions of (a) Canada, (b) Australia, (c) Sweden and (d) Finland to resume their funding for that organisation.

Andrew Mitchell: We are appalled by allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. We have paused any future funding of UNRWA.

We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, including through other UN agencies and British charities.

Our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response. We are aware that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Catherine Colonna have now provided their interim reports to the UN Secretary-General. We want UNRWA to give detailed undertakings about changes in personnel, policy and precedents to ensure this can never happen again.

We are working with allies to try to bring this situation to a rapid conclusion, not least because UNRWA has a vital role to play in providing aid and services in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/20201>

UNRWA: Finance

Brendan O'Hara (SNP) [20652] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 7 March 2024 to Question 16878 on UNRWA: Finance, what assurances he has sought directly from UNRWA; and what his criteria are to resume funding of UNRWA.

Andrew Mitchell: We want UNRWA to give detailed undertakings about changes in personnel, policy and precedents to ensure this can never happen again.

We are aware that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Catherine Colonna have now provided their interim reports to the UN Secretary-General.

We are working with allies to try to bring this situation to a rapid conclusion, not least because UNRWA has a vital role to play in providing aid and services in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20652>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16878>

UNRWA: Finance

Brendan O'Hara (SNP) [20653] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the decision of Finland to resume funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK was appalled by allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned.

We are aware that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Catherine Colonna have now provided their interim reports to the UN Secretary-General. We want UNRWA to give detailed undertakings about changes in personnel, policy and precedents to ensure this can never happen again.

Our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20653>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru) [20202] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps the Government is taking to ensure that Israel allows the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to provide humanitarian aid to northern Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have underlined the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, open a crossing in northern Gaza and increase capacity inside Gaza, as well as fully enable the UN's minimal operating requirements, including by allowing visas, telecommunications equipment, armoured vehicles, trucks and personal protective equipment.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/20202>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Gaza: Hospitals

Rosena Allin-Khan (Labour) [20723] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the situation at al-Shifa hospital in Gaza in relation to the ongoing Israeli military operations in the area.

Rosena Allin-Khan (Labour) [20724] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he is taking diplomatic steps to ensure the protection of medical staff who are trapped in al-Shifa hospital in Gaza.

Rosena Allin-Khan (Labour) [20725] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what representations his Department are making to the Israeli government on safe evacuation from al-Shifa hospital complex.

Andrew Mitchell: We have been clear that all parties must afford civilians the protection that is their right under international law. That includes respecting the sanctity of hospitals, so that doctors can continue to care for the sick and injured. Israel must take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20723>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20724>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20725>

Gaza: Hospitals

Rosena Allin-Khan (Labour) [20726] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has sought legal advice on Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law in the context of Israeli military operations targeting the al-Shifa hospital complex.

Andrew Mitchell: We have been clear that all parties must afford civilians the protection that is their right under international law. That includes respecting the

sanctity of hospitals, so that doctors can continue to care for the sick and injured. Israel must take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

We keep advice on Israel's adherence to International Humanitarian Law under review.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20726>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Dan Carden (Labour) [20758] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the news release from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights entitled Attacks on the humanitarian aid distribution system, published on 22 March 2024.

Dan Carden (Labour) [20759] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what diplomatic steps his Department is taking to help ensure the protection of (a) Palestinians and (b) humanitarian workers during the distribution of aid in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: It is imperative that those doing life-saving work are properly protected. The Foreign Secretary has called on Israel to reform its deconfliction mechanism to ensure the safety of aid workers and to make progress on the UN's minimal operating requirements, including more visas and driver approvals granted, as well as more trucks permitted to cross into Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20758>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20759>

The news release referred to above can be read at

<https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/un-human-rights-office-opt-attacks-humanitarian-aid-distribution-system-enar>

UNRWA: Finance

Alan Brown (SNP) [20677] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 25 March 2024 to Question 18833 on UNRWA: Finance, how much funding he has allocated to UNRWA for the financial year 2024-25; what his criteria are to resume funding; what discussions he is having on resuming funding; and whether he has undertaken an impact assessment on the pausing of funding.

Andrew Mitchell: We have paused any future funding of UNRWA.

We are aware that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Catherine Colonna have now provided their interim reports to the UN Secretary-General. We want UNRWA to give detailed undertakings about changes in personnel, policy and precedents to ensure this can never happen again. We are working with allies to try to bring this situation to a rapid conclusion, not least because UNRWA have a vital role to play in providing aid and services in Gaza.

Our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response. We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to people in Gaza who desperately need it, including through other UN agencies and British charities. We trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air. UK funding has supported the work of partners including the British Red Cross, World Food Programme, UNICEF and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) to deliver vital supplies.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20677>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-15/18833>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Alan Brown (SNP) [20678] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 25 March 2024 to Question 19633 on Gaza: Humanitarian Aid, if he will publish a detailed plan on the alternative routes the UK has planned for ensuring aid gets into Gaza; and what contingencies he has in place should aid not be delivered.

Andrew Mitchell: On 5 April, Israel committed to significant steps to increase the amount of aid getting to Gaza. The UK has urged Israel to take these steps for a long time and they are welcome. We are working to get aid through these new humanitarian routes as soon as possible.

To date, UK funding has supported the work of partners including the British Red Cross, World Food Programme, UNICEF and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) to deliver vital supplies.

We continue to call 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20678>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-20/19633>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Alan Brown (SNP) [20679] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, pursuant to the Answer of 25 March 2024 Question 19633 on Gaza: Humanitarian Aid, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the additional border crossings; and whether he has sought assurances from Israel on compliance with opening a crossing in northern Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis.

The British Government have pressed Israeli counterparts to increase the flow of aid into Gaza.

On 5th April Israel committed to significant steps to increase the amount of aid getting to Gaza, including allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Port of Ashdod and the Erez checkpoint.

The UK has urged Israel to take these steps for a long time and they are welcome.

We are resolved that the international community will work with Israel to see these vital changes fully implemented.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20679>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-20/19633>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Philippa Whitford (SNP) [20654] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what representations he has made to the Israeli government since it announced it would open a new aid crossing into northern Gaza; and what steps he plans to take to help (a) prevent starvation of Palestinian citizens and (b) ensure compliance with international humanitarian law.

Andrew Mitchell: Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis. The UK is playing a leadership role in alleviating that suffering. We are doing everything we can to get more aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air.

On 20 March, the Foreign Secretary announced the UK has funded WFP to provide 2000 tons of food aid, enough to feed 275,000 people in Gaza. For example, on 20 March, the Royal Air Force airdropped 10 tonnes of food aid - including water, rice and baby food - directly to civilians in Gaza.

The British Government has pressed Israeli counterparts to increase the flow of aid into Gaza.

On 5th April Israel committed to significant steps to increase the amount of aid getting to Gaza, including allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Port of Ashdod and the Erez checkpoint.

The UK has urged Israel to take these steps for a long time and they are welcome. We are resolved that the international community will work with Israel to see these vital changes fully implemented.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20654>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/largest-uk-aid-delivery-enters-gaza-to-feed-275000-people>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [20387] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make representations to the Israeli government on the potential merits of enabling a neutral humanitarian organisation to (a) conduct checks on aid and (b) facilitate the opening of more land routes.

Andrew Mitchell: We have set out very clearly the steps that Israel needs to take, including an immediate humanitarian pause to get more aid in and the hostages out; increased capacity inside Gaza and fully enabling the UN's minimal operating requirements, including by allowing visas, telecommunications equipment, armoured vehicles, trucks and personal protective equipment; as well as increased access for aid through land routes, including the scaling up of the Jordan corridor, with a streamlined screening and delivery process, the opening of a crossing in northern Gaza, Ashdod Port fully open for aid delivery and increased screening capacity at Kerem Shalom and Nitzana to seven days a week and extended hours. We also need to see an expansion of the types of aid allowed into Gaza and the provision of electricity, water and telecommunications, to both the north and the south of Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/20387>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [20388] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will make representations to the Israeli government on (a) publishing an official list of aid that is restricted to Gaza and (b) ensuring that nutritional and medical aid needed to treat starvation are not restricted.

Andrew Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary has been clear that we need to see increased access for aid through land routes, increased capacity inside Gaza, an expansion of the types of aid allowed into Gaza, and the provision of electricity, water and telecommunications to both the north and the south of Gaza.

We are doing all we can to get as much food into Gaza as possible. On 20 March, the Foreign Secretary announced that the UK has funded WFP to provide 2000 tons of food aid, enough to feed 275,000 people in Gaza.

A field hospital, provided by UK Aid funding to UK-Med, has arrived in Gaza. This facility, staffed by UK and local medics, will be able to treat over 100 patients a day, ensuring those with health issues have access to vital aid.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/20388>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

Gaza: Food Aid

Dan Carden (Labour) [20756] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the news story by the UN entitled Israel tells UN it will reject UNRWA food convoys into northern Gaza, published on 24 March 2024, if he will make an assessment of the potential implications for his policies of the Israeli government's decision to no longer approve the passage of any UNRWA food convoys into northern Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: We want to see Israel increase capacity inside Gaza and fully enable the UN's minimal operating requirements, including by allowing visas, telecommunications equipment, armoured vehicles, trucks and personal protective equipment.

In addition, we have called on Israel to increase access for aid and expand the types of aid allowed into Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20756>

The news story referred to above can be read at

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147916>

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

Dan Carden (Labour) [20757] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the update from the United Nations entitled Gaza: UN aid team reaches stricken north, confirms shocking disease and hunger, published on 22 March 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: The British Government has pressed Israeli counterparts to increase the flow of aid into Gaza.

On 5th April Israel committed to significant steps to increase the amount of aid getting to Gaza, including allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Port of Ashdod and the Erez checkpoint.

The UK has urged Israel to take these steps for a long time and they are welcome. We are resolved that the international community will work with Israel to see these vital changes fully implemented.

Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis. The UK is playing a leadership role in alleviating that suffering. We are doing everything we can to get more aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air. For example, on 20 March, the Foreign Secretary announced the UK has funded WFP to provide 2000 tons of food aid, enough to feed 275,000 people in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20757>

The update referred to above can be read at

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147861>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/largest-uk-aid-delivery-enters-gaza-to-feed-275000-people>

Palestinians: Detainees

Dan Carden (Labour) [20760] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the appeal by Israel-based civil society groups to the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment relating to the alleged (a) torture and (b) inhumane treatment of Palestinian detainees, published on 16 February 2024.

Andrew Mitchell: We are concerned by reports of ill-treatment of Palestinian detainees in Israeli military detention. The UK Government is clear that

administrative detention should only be used when it is justified in accordance with international law. Those under detention should either be charged or released. We are committed to working with Israel to secure improvements in its detention practices.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20760>

The report referred to above can be read at

https://www.adalah.org/uploads/uploads/Submission_SR_Torture_final-15.2.24.pdf

Research: Palestinians

Kerry McCarthy (Labour) [19566] To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of providing further funding for Researchers at Risk Fellowships to be made available to Palestinian researchers.

Andrew Griffith: The current Researchers at Risk Fellowship Programme aims to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has exposed Ukraine-based researchers and their dependents to direct threats. My Department is keeping the programme, which is delivered by the British Academy, under close review.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-20/19566>

Information about Researchers at Risk Fellowships, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/funding/researchers-at-risk-fellowships/>

House of Lords Written Answers

Hamis: Sexual Offences

Lord Turnberg (Labour) [HL3701] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of allegations of rape of Israeli women by members of Hamas in its attack on 7 October 2023, and the implications for international law.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Reports of sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023 detail abhorrent acts of violence against Israeli women and girls. The UK stands in solidarity with all of the victims and survivors.

We condemn sexual violence unequivocally and without exception. These reports must be fully investigated to ensure justice for survivors and victims.

The international community should be clear in condemning sexual violence wherever it occurs, including in Israel.

Conflict-related sexual violence is an abuse of human rights and when perpetrated in the context of an armed conflict, can constitute a violation of international humanitarian law such as a war crime.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3701>

Gaza: UNRWA

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL3524] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have spoken to Israeli authorities concerning the incident on 18 March when Philippe Lazzarini, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Commissioner-General of UNRWA, was denied entry to Gaza; and what assessment they have made of the incident.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware of the situation referenced in the question.

The UK Government continues to press Israel for increased access for aid, an expansion of the types of aid allowed into Gaza, and for increased capacity inside Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-21/hl3524>

UK Parliament Petition

Sale of arms to Israel

The petition of residents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk, Declares that the government's sale of arms to Israel is unacceptable, as there is substantial evidence that these arms are being used to kill innocent civilians in Gaza; further declares that this is in direct breach of the UK arms export policy, which states that the licences cannot be granted if there is a "clear risk" the arms might be used in a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Government to suspend all arms transfers to Israel including weapons, arms, munition and ammunition, parts and components and other equipment that pose a substantial risk that they could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law in this conflict. And the petitioners remain, etc.—[\[Presented by Martyn Day, Official Report, 31 January 2024; Vol. 744, c. 954.\]](#) [P002909]

Observations from the Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): The Government take their export control responsibilities very seriously and operate one of the most robust and transparent export control regimes in the world. The Government assess every application on a case-by-case basis against strict assessment criteria, the strategic export licensing criteria, and once issued, all our extant export licences are kept under careful and continual review as standard.

The Government's assessments draw on all available information relevant to the criteria in the case, including reports from non-governmental organisations and our overseas network. The export licensing system, and the careful assessment of all licences, lies with the Export Control Joint Unit. The ECJU is comprised of subject matter experts and officials in the Department for Business and Trade, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Ministry of Defence.

The Government can and do respond quickly and flexibly to changing international circumstances. The ECJU has in place an established process for responding at pace to changing conditions in a country where the UK has previously granted export licences, and where those licences remain extant. The FCDO advises DBT on the situation in country and the risks this poses with respect to the UK's export control responsibilities. The MOD advises DBT on the risks of diversion of exported goods and national security risks arising from hostile state activity. The Department for Business and Trade, with the Secretary of State as the decision-making authority, decides whether to amend, suspend or revoke any relevant licences.

The Government consider a range of factors, including examining the political and security conditions in the destination country, the nature of the equipment to be exported, the organisation or unit which will ultimately be the user of the equipment, and all available information about how similar equipment has been used in the past and how it is likely to be used in the future.

The UK supports Israel's legitimate right to defend itself and take action against terrorism, provided it is within the bounds of international humanitarian law.

The Government are monitoring the situation in Israel and Gaza very closely and will take any action we consider appropriate as the situation develops. If export licences are found to be no longer consistent with the UK strategic export licensing criteria, including if items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law, then those licences can be revoked, suspended or amended.

Downing Street

PM call with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel: 16 April 2024

The Prime Minister ... reiterated the UK's steadfast support for Israel's security and for wider regional stability. Prime Minister Netanyahu thanked the UK for its rapid and robust support in the face of Iran's reckless and dangerous attack on Saturday.

The Prime Minister said Iran had badly miscalculated and was increasingly isolated on the global stage, with the G7 coordinating a diplomatic response. He stressed that significant escalation was in no one's interest and would only deepen insecurity in the Middle East. This was a moment for calm heads to prevail.

On Gaza, the Prime Minister said he remained gravely concerned about the deepening humanitarian crisis. The UK wanted to see a massive step change in aid access to flood Gaza with vital supplies, including Israel opening up new aid routes as quickly as possible. The Prime Minister said it was deeply disappointing that Hamas blocked a deal at the weekend that would have saved Palestinian lives and secured the safe release of hostages.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-call-with-prime-minister-netanyahu-of-israel-16-april-2024>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UK statement on violence in the Occupied West Bank

The UK is alarmed by the shocking levels of violence in the Occupied West Bank, sparked by the appalling killing of 14 y/o Israeli Binyamin Achimair on Saturday.

Violent attacks by extremist Israeli settlers have since led to the killing of four Palestinians Jihad Abu Alia, Omar Ahmad Abdulghani Hamed, Abdulrahman Fadel, and Mohammed Jame in the last three days, as well as injury to more than 75 others and serious damage to property. Such violence towards civilians is completely unacceptable and must stop immediately. The UK has previously sanctioned extremist Israeli settlers who perpetrate such attacks, and remains committed to acting robustly and swiftly in support of peace and stability in the West Bank.

These killings, and subsequent actions, are escalating violence in the Occupied West Bank and the wider region at a critical time. It is vital that Israeli authorities restore calm and conduct urgent and transparent investigations into all deaths, and ensure all violent perpetrators are brought to justice and held accountable for their actions.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-statement-on-violence-in-the-occupied-west-bank>

Good Morning Britain ... Foreign Secretary @David_Cameron shares 'a huge message of sympathy' to the people of Israel. He adds that the most important thing is to 'urge a sense of calm.' [plus video]

<https://twitter.com/GMB/status/1779777686539214897>

The UK condemns unequivocally Iran's reckless attack against Israel: UK statement at the UN Security Council

The United Kingdom condemns unequivocally Iran's reckless attack against Israel, which risked thousands of civilian casualties.

The scale and nature of Iran's heinous assault – the first direct attack from Iran on Israeli soil – poses grave risks to the security and stability of citizens across the Middle East.

The United Kingdom has long been clear that Iran plays an unacceptable role in destabilising the region, and that it also bears responsibility for the actions of the groups it has supported militarily, financially, and politically over many years. Through this attack, Iran has once again demonstrated that it is intent on sowing chaos in the region.

As we have demonstrated, the United Kingdom will continue to stand up for Israel's security, and that of all our regional partners, including Jordan and Iraq. We welcome the actions of our allies to deter the Iranian threat.

No one wants to see further bloodshed. The United Kingdom is also continuing to work urgently alongside the international community to stabilise the situation and prevent further escalation. It is vital that all parties exercise maximum restraint and refrain from any action that may heighten tensions further in the region.

We also call on Iran to release the MSC Aries and its crew unconditionally and without delay.

Iran's actions do nothing to advance the prospects for peace in Israel and Gaza. As set out in Security Council resolution 2728, the United Kingdom remains resolved to work with international partners to secure an immediate pause in the fighting in Gaza to get aid in and hostages out, leading to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-united-kingdom-condemns-unequivocally-irans-reckless-attack-against-israel-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

UNSCR 2728, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728\(2024\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728(2024))

Welsh Senedd Oral Answer

Israel: Sale of Arms

Mabon ap Gwynfor (Plaid Cymru): ... I was seeking a statement from the Cabinet Secretary for the economy on the role of Wales in arming the Israeli Government and the Israel Defense Forces. The Trefnydd will be aware that over 33,000 have now been killed in Gaza and that 1.7 million are suffering famine at the moment. Canada, Spain and others have ceased the licensing of the sale of arms to the Israeli Government, whilst the UK Government has continued to license the sale of arms to them. The International Court of Justice has called on the Israeli Government to cease actions that, according to the ICJ, appear to be falling into the definition of genocide. So, the fact that the UK is allowing for such arms to be sold and to be used by the IDF means that the UK is culpable in these atrocities. Companies from Wales do provide components for these weapons, so can we have a statement on what steps the Government is taking in order to prevent this from happening, and an assurance that Welsh Government funding isn't being provided to companies that are funding these weapons?

Jane Hutt (Chief Whip & Trefnydd): ... over the weeks of the Easter recess, we've seen the horrendous and appalling situation in the middle east and have seen the impact of the famine on the people, and children particularly, of Gaza. Certainly, this is something where, in terms of our powers and responsibilities, we have no role in terms of defence and the sale of arms, but certainly I will be sharing this question with the Cabinet Secretary for economy in terms of Wales and where we sit in that situation in terms of that question.

Northern Ireland Assembly Members Statements

Gaza War

Gerard Carroll (People Before Profit Alliance): Over the weekend, Iran fired some 300 missiles at Israel, and the world watched with bated breath as we awaited the outcome of what could have been a wider confrontation in the Middle East. Today, I call, loudly and clearly, for a de-escalation of violence but also for people to reflect on what has brought us to that point.

For six months now, Israel has been committing genocide in Gaza, the horror of which would have been unimaginable before. Israel has destroyed hospitals, deliberately murdered children, taken thousands of hostages and systematically denied people food, water and medical aid. Israel has killed over 33,000 Palestinians and committed the most heinous war crimes. In that time, Israel has also bombed Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, Iran and Yemen, with the complete backing of Western imperialists in the US, Britain and elsewhere.

I have my own view of the Iranian state. I have stood with my Iranian sisters and brothers here in Belfast under the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom", but its actions over the weekend were in retaliation to Israel's bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus.

What we are seeing started with Israel's genocide in Gaza and must end with a ceasefire in Gaza. Israel is a rogue state that has risked a wider regional war with every reckless action that it has taken. Israel and those who continue to support and arm it, including the US and Britain, now have to be responsible for de-escalating the violence. The G7, drawn from the so-called leaders of the democratic world, was quick to defend Israel and talked of guaranteeing peace in the region. As those countries' sophisticated defence systems mopped up Iran's missiles, Israel continued to bombard Gaza overnight with the very weapons that they provide.

Their hypocrisy and Israel's unchallenged barbarity make a mockery of the supposed rules-based international order. Those people will do anything to protect their interests. We have seen it in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and across the globe, so it is up to ordinary people to continue to press home the demands that can bring about peace: boycotts, divestments and sanctions (BDS) against Israel; the British and Irish Governments to expel the Israeli ambassadors; countries to stop arming Israel; and the US military to get out of Aldergrove and Shannon. The Stormont Executive must now urgently call for an immediate ceasefire.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2024/04/15&docID=396689#4300309>

Gaza War

Paul Frew (DUP): ... We are all, I think, horrified at the escalation of the war in the Middle East, with the recent attack that Iran has perpetrated on Israeli soil for the first time in history. We see the horrors that war brings and the innocent victims who suffer war. However, I want to talk about a group of people who have been forgotten about: the 129 people who were lifted from their homes, who witnessed their family being slaughtered on 7 October and who, to this day, remain captive. For more than six months, they have been hidden away underground, in tunnels, with no daylight and very little food, and treated appallingly.

We all can see and think about six months, but those people — the Israeli hostages who were taken by Hamas — fight a war of personal attrition in which they do not know whether they will stay alive for another hour, when they are going to eat or have a sup of water or when they are going to receive medical attention, and they do not know when they are going to be molested again. Think also of their families who sit at home awaiting the safe

return of those hostages, not knowing whether they will ever see their loved ones again. Within that number are two babies who were nine months old on 7 October, and no one knows whether they are alive or dead.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2024/04/15&docID=396689#4300314>

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Question time: Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Zsolt Németh (Hungary, EC/DA): ... We witness a horrible disaster dividing the Middle East. Starting on the 7 October Hamas attack, now continued with the 13 April Iranian attack, with hundreds of drones and missiles on Israel. The ECR stands firm with Israel and the Jews in the world, especially on my side in Hungary.

What is your position on the Iranian threat to peace? And how do you think the Council of Europe could contribute to prevent the escalation of war in the Middle East. ...

Marija Pejčinović-Burić (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): ... If you follow my declarations, I made one condemning Iran's attack on Israel, which happened on Saturday night. My firm belief is that in already very troubled waters of the Middle East, yet another war would be too much for global security and for people living there. I think you were right to mention the 7 October horrible attack by Hamas on Israel, which I also condemned.

Also, what was happening in the last couple of months, I think we are witnessing a lot of suffering, a lot of civilians are attacked and killed, among whom women and children, with people not getting humanitarian assistance.

Whatever you can imagine, the Council of Europe, as a human rights, rule of law, and democracy institution, cannot accept it.

Having said that, apart from condemning and really joining the international community, who calls for stopping the war, calls for releasing all the hostages, calls for humanitarian aid workers to be able to do their work, and, in particular, calls for stopping attacking civilians, which is a blatant violation of international law, and calls for dialogue.

I think we can only be very vocal on that. Knowing that we are a regional organisation, that we are a European organisation, other than working on dialogue, peace, and good neighbourly relations with this part of the world, I don't see much more that the Council of Europe can do.

Of course, what is happening there is horrifying.

We have the war in Ukraine, where we also witnessed horrible situations. I think having a war to expand with Iran would nearly go to a total war. So, I hope that this will stop and that talks and dialogue will prevail.

<https://pace.coe.int/en/verbatim/2024-04-16/pm/en#speech-27352>

Question time: Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Laura Castel (Spain, UEL): ... My political group is convinced that staying silent in the face of a genocide in Gaza is equivalent to backing the perpetrators.

Taking into account that we are a human rights organisation, and Israel and Palestine are both linked with our organisation, do you not believe that after six months of silence, the Council of Europe could and should play a more active role in relation to the protection of the human rights in Gaza, and in Palestine in general? ...

Marija Pejčinović-Burić (Secretary General of the Council of Europe): ... what we can do and what we do is because all this has an impact on our societies, it has an impact, I think, if you recall just the aftermath of 7 October, there was a rise in anti-Muslim and antisemitic feelings, and this is where the Council of Europe has

something to say, and this is where the Council of Europe is working.

I have a special representative on antisemitic, anti-Muslim and other religious crimes, who is working on that. Our European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has two policy guidelines on antisemitism and on anti-Muslim hatred.

I have very recently, only a month ago, I have called for the first meeting of co-ordinators on anti-Muslim hatred because I believe we have to tackle these issues in Europe but sometimes in these endeavours, we are joined with some countries outside of the remit of the Council of Europe, from North America and some other places. So as we cannot – because it is not our mandate – engage directly, we have to manage the consequences of this horrible war and the problem on average fellow citizens of one or the other ethnic or religious communities.

So this is where I think the Council of Europe should continue working very hard because working on these issues in particular, the two that I mentioned, but on any kind of interreligious or other hatred is the way to have peaceful societies, and in a way that does not concern only Europe, where the 46 member states are situated, but it can have an impact outside of the Council of Europe remit. So I think this is the area in which indirectly, and fortunately, not directly, we can do our part of the work.

<https://pace.coe.int/en/verbatim/2024-04-16/pm/en#speech-27360>

G7

G7 statement on Iran's attack against Israel

We, the Leaders of the G7, unequivocally condemn in the strongest terms Iran's direct and unprecedented attack against Israel. Iran fired hundreds of drones and missiles towards Israel. Israel, with the help of its partners, defeated the attack.

We express our full solidarity and support to Israel and its people and reaffirm our commitment towards its security.

With its actions, Iran has further stepped toward the destabilization of the region and risks provoking an uncontrollable regional escalation. This must be avoided. We will continue to work to stabilize the situation and avoid further escalation. In this spirit, we demand that Iran and its proxies cease their attacks, and we stand ready to take further measures now and in response to further destabilizing initiatives.

We will also strengthen our cooperation to end the crisis in Gaza, including by continuing to work towards an immediate and sustainable ceasefire and the release of hostages by Hamas, and deliver increased humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in need.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/g7-statement-on-irans-attack-against-israel-14-april-2024>

United Nations

Secretary-General Urges Exercising Restraint, Stepping Back 'from the Brink', in Remarks to Security Council Session Concerning Iran's Attack on Israel

... The Middle East is on the brink.

The people of the region are confronting a real danger of a devastating full-scale conflict.

Now is the time to defuse and de-escalate. Now is the time for maximum restraint.

This emergency session has been convened upon an urgent request by the Permanent Representative of Israel, who noted in his letter dated 13 April to the President of the Security Council, that Iran had launched — and I quote — “a direct attack from within its territory of more than 200 UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles], cruise missiles and ballistic

missiles towards Israel in clear violation of the UN Charter and international law”.

Yesterday, the Permanent Representative of Iran also addressed a letter to the President of the Security Council, stating that — and I quote — “in the late hours of 13 April 2024, the Islamic Republic of Iran carried out a series of military strikes on Israeli military objectives.”

He stated that the action was taken — and I quote — “in the exercise of Iran’s inherent right to self-defence as outlined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, and in response to the Israeli recurring military aggressions, particularly its armed attack on 1 April 2024 against Iranian diplomatic premises”.

According to the latest reports, Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles from its territory towards Israel, with most intercepted.

Several missiles reportedly struck within Israeli territory, one of which damaged an Israeli military facility in the south of the country. And overall, a few civilians were injured.

When the nature of the attack became clear, I stated the following last night and I quote: “I strongly condemn the serious escalation represented by the large-scale attack launched on Israel by the Islamic Republic of Iran this evening. And I call for an immediate cessation of these hostilities.”

I remind all Member States that the Charter of the United Nations prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

Furthermore, the principle of inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises and personnel must be respected in all cases in accordance with international law, as I stated when condemning the 1 April attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus.

It’s time to step back from the brink.

It is vital to avoid any action that could lead to major military confrontations on multiple fronts in the Middle East.

Civilians are already bearing the brunt and paying the highest price.

And we have a shared responsibility to actively engage all parties concerned to prevent further escalation.

As the Friendly Relations Declaration of 1970 states, acts of reprisal involving the use of force are barred under international law.

We have a shared responsibility to secure an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid.

We have a shared responsibility to stop violence in the occupied West Bank, de-escalate the situation along the Blue Line, and re-establish safe navigation in the Red Sea.

We have a shared responsibility to work for peace. Regional — and indeed global — peace and security are being undermined by the hour. Neither the region nor the world can afford more war.

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22188.doc.htm>

Warning Middle East at Risk of Full-Scale Conflict, Secretary-General Urges All Parties to ‘Step Back from the Brink’, in Emergency Security Council Session

A day after Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles from its territory towards Israel - most intercepted - the people of the Middle East are confronting a real danger of a devastating full-scale conflict, the UN chief told the Security Council today during an emergency meeting, as delegates urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint. ...

[\[click here to read the Secretary-General’s speech in full\]](#)

The representative of the United States condemned in the strongest terms the “unprecedented” attack on Israel by Iran and its militant proxies, whose intent was “to cause significant damage and death”. Iran’s reckless actions pose a threat to populations

in Israel and other UN Member States in the region, including Jordan and Iraq. The Council must not let Iran's actions go unanswered, he asserted, adding that for far too long, Iran has flagrantly violated its international legal obligations by arming Hezbollah; arming, facilitating, and enabling Houthi attacks; and transferring drones to the Russian Federation. Additionally, Iran was complicit in the 7 October attack on Israel as it has provided significant funding and training for the military wing of Hamas and, therefore, contributed to the current crisis in Gaza. ...

Also condemning the unprecedented attack launched by Iran against Israel, **the speaker for France** said Tehran "crossed a new threshold in its destabilizing action, risking a military escalation". She welcomed that Israel was able to successfully repel the attack, therefore "avoiding the worse and sparing many civilians". ...

Her counterpart from the United Kingdom unequivocally condemned Iran's attack against Israel, which "risked thousands of civilian casualties". The scale and nature of its "heinous assault" – the first direct attack from Tehran on Israeli soil - poses grave risks to the security and stability of citizens across the Middle East. ... [[click here to read this speech in full](#)]

Meanwhile, **the representative of the Russian Federation** observed that while the Secretary-General instantly and publicly reacted and condemned Iran's actions, he did not propose to brief the Council on 2 April when an emergency meeting was called on the Israeli strikes against the consular premises in Damascus. ...

Rejecting such hypocrisy and double standards, he stressed that the night of the 14 April "did not happen in a vacuum" – instead, the steps undertaken by Iran became a reaction to the Council's "disgraceful inaction" regarding the egregious attack by Israel against Damascus. ...

China's delegate described the 1 April attack on Iran's diplomatic premises in Syria as a grave violation of international law and a breach of the sovereignty of both countries. He noted Iran's statement that its military action was in response to Israel's aggression against its diplomatic premises and "the matter can be deemed concluded". The ongoing situation - the latest spillover of the Gaza conflict - serves as another reminder that the Palestinian question remains central to the Middle East issue. "If the flames of the Gaza conflict are allowed to continue raging, then the adverse spillover is set to spread further, making the region even more unstable," he cautioned ...

The representative of Israel said that Iran's attack was launched from its soil as well as from Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq. He said that his country has repeatedly called on the Council to take concrete action against Tehran, warning that "its hegemonic ambitions of global domination must be stopped before it drives the world to the point of no return ... Last night, the world witnessed unprecedented escalation, serving as the most evident proof of what happens when warnings are not heeded. The direct Iranian attack against Israel – the first of its kind - is just "the most recent chapter in a blood-soaked saga". In this sense, Iran's regime – "seeking death and destruction" - is no different than the Third Reich. ...

But today, publicly attacking Israel from its sovereign territory, the mask of its deniability has been removed, he continued. "As Iran's mask has fallen, the world's complacency must also fall," he said, adding that Tehran and its proxies must be shown that the world will no longer stand idle. "Can you imagine if the attack was carried under the Iranian nuclear umbrella?" he asked, warning that Tehran is on the verge of becoming a nuclear power. ...

Iran's delegate countered that his country's operation was entirely in the exercise of its inherent right to self-defence. "This concluded action was necessary and proportionate," he said, adding that it was carried out carefully to only target military objectives, minimize the potential for escalation and prevent civilian harm. He expressed regret that the United States, the United Kingdom and France have chosen to turn a blind eye to the Israeli armed attacks against its diplomatic premises in Syria. Moreover, for over six months now,

these countries have shielded Israel from any responsibility for the Gaza massacre. “While they have denied Iran’s inherent right to self-defence against the Israeli armed attacks on our diplomatic premises, at the same time, they shamefully justified the Israeli massacre and genocide against the defenseless Palestinian people under the pretext of self-defence,” he observed. ...

Syria’s delegate said that yesterday, the region witnessed “an inevitable outcome of Israel’s repeated aggression and grave violations of international law” on his country’s territory. ...

Meanwhile, Iran’s response - an urgent necessity imposed by Israel’s persistent crimes - amounts to “a sound and practical exercise of the legitimate right of self-defence,” he said.

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15660.doc.htm>

Red Sea Crisis, Gaza Conflict Pose Threat to Progress, Stability in Yemen, Speakers Tell Security Council

... “In the absence of a ceasefire in Gaza and a complete termination of attacks in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, the threat of further escalation persists,” warned **Hans Grundberg, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen**, noting that the recent developments involving Iran and Israel underscore the urgency of this matter. ...

While the conflicts in Yemen and the wider region have become undeniably interlinked, he emphasized that resolving the conflict in Yemen must not be contingent upon the resolution of other issues. “We cannot risk Yemen’s chance for peace becoming collateral damage,” he asserted ...

“It is no secret that Iran provides weapons to the Houthis in violation of the UN arms embargo,” said **the representative of the United States**, urging Tehran to stop fomenting instability and terror in the region. Condemning “unprecedented attacks” by Iran against Israel this past weekend, he requested the Secretary-General to include — in his monthly reports on resolution 2722 (2024) — information regarding the types of weapons used in each incident and, where appropriate, the likely origin of these weapons.

The United Kingdom’s delegate also noted Iran’s “unacceptable role in destabilizing the region, including their role in supporting the Houthis in Yemen”. **Her counterpart from France** underscored that the attacks carried by Iran and its proxies against Israel constitute a serious and major threat to international peace and security and the stability of the region ...

The representative of the Russian Federation, however, argued that the root cause of this situation is the continued bloodshed in Gaza in violation of Council resolution 2728 (2024), categorically condemning missile and bomb attacks by the United States-led Western coalition targeting the sovereign territory of Yemen. ... **the speaker for China** pointed out ... “The tensions in the Red Sea are a visible manifestation of the spillover effects of the Gaza conflict,” ...

Rounding out the discussion, **the representative of Yemen** said ... “the terrorist Houthi militias, as usual, decided to shirk their responsibilities towards peace”. They chose to undermine the political process with a destructive and dangerous escalation in the Red Sea under the pretence of assisting Palestinians in Gaza. The flow of Iranian weapons to the Houthis could lead to prolonging the conflict in Yemen and worsening the humanitarian crisis, he warned, declaring: “The Yemeni Government remains committed to the choice of peace.”

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15661.doc.htm>

UNSCR 2722, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2722\(2024\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2722(2024))

UNSCR 2728, referred to above, can be read at [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728\(2024\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2728(2024))

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Israel and Iran must de-escalate conflict to protect human rights, warn UN experts

... Allegedly to counter foreign state support for “terrorism”, Israel attacked an Iranian consulate building in Syria on 1 April 2024, killing two Iranian generals ... five other Iranian military officers, alleged Hezbollah member Hussein Youssef, and two Syrians. Two Syrian police officers guarding the consulate were also injured. The residence of Iran’s Ambassador to Syria was located inside the building.

Iran responded by firing over 300 missiles and drones at Israel on 13 April, severely injuring a seven-year-old child and damaging a military facility.

“All countries are [prohibited](#) from arbitrarily depriving individuals of their right to life in military operations abroad, including when countering terrorism,” said the experts. “Killings in foreign territory are arbitrary when they are not authorised under international law,” they said.

The experts said Israel does not appear to have been exercising self-defence on 1 April because it presented no evidence that Iran was directly committing an “armed attack” on Israel or [sending](#) non-state armed groups to attack it. The experts noted that Israel has not provided any legal justification for the strike or reported it to the Security Council, as required by [Article 51](#) of the United Nations Charter.

“Israel’s attack consequently violated the prohibition on the use of armed force against another state under [Article 2\(4\)](#) of the Charter,” the experts said. “Illegal force was used not only against Iran’s armed forces but also against Syrian territory. Israel’s attack was partly launched from the Golan Heights, which is illegally annexed Syrian territory,” they said.

The experts warned that Israeli military personnel and civilian officials responsible for the attack may also have committed crimes under an international counter-terrorism treaty of 1971, the [Convention](#) on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons. “It is an offence to violently attack the official premises or private accommodation of a diplomat where it is likely to endanger them. ...

The experts said Iran’s response was also a prohibited use of force under international law. Israel’s strike on 1 April may have been serious enough to qualify as an “armed attack” on Iran, since it targeted senior military commanders and diplomatic premises. Yet Iran had no right of self-defence on 13 April because Israel’s attack concluded on 1 April. ...

For the same reason, Israel’s initial right of self-defence against the unlawful Iranian armed attack on 13 April no longer persists since the attack has been successfully repelled. ...

“Both strikes may also constitute the international crime of [aggression](#) by civilian and military leaders responsible,” they said.

The experts noted that Israel has previously attacked Iranian military and security personnel abroad apparently to counter alleged foreign state support for terrorism, without demonstrating that Iran sent those groups to attack Israel. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/israel-and-iran-must-de-escalate-conflict-protect-human-rights-warn-un>

Türk urges all States to act over crises in Gaza, West Bank

... Israel continues to impose unlawful restrictions on the entry and distribution of humanitarian assistance, and to carry out widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure.

The High Commissioner repeats that there must be an immediate ceasefire, the hostages must be released, and full, unfettered humanitarian aid must be allowed to flow immediately. Those delivering or trying to access humanitarian assistance must never be attacked.

No area of the Gaza Strip has been spared from Israel's bombardment. Nearly 1.7 million people remain forcibly displaced, living in appalling conditions and under constant threat. In the past week alone, fighting has intensified in Middle Gaza leading to the displacement of some 10,000 people from in and around An Nuseirat camp and near Wadi Gaza. ... Since October 2023, 534 mosques have been destroyed or damaged according to the Gaza Government Media Office. Places of worship are protected under the laws of war. On 14 April, Israeli Defense Forces reportedly opened fire on a group of Palestinians on Al Rashid Road who were attempting to return to their homes in northern Gaza, killing at least one Palestinian woman and injuring at least 11 others. Intentional targeting and killing of civilians is a war crime.

In the West Bank, escalating violence over the past few days is also a matter of grave concern. Palestinians have been subjected to waves of attacks by hundreds of Israeli settlers, often accompanied or supported by Israeli Security Forces (ISF). Following the killing of a 14-year-old Israeli boy from a settler family, four Palestinians, including a child, were killed and Palestinian property was destroyed in revenge attacks.

According to information received by the UN Human Rights Office, armed settlers and Israeli forces entered a number of towns including Al Mughayyer, Khirbit Abu Falah, Kufer Malilk, Al Mazra'a Asharqiya, Beitin village in Ramallah, Duma and Qusra in Nablus, as well as the Bethlehem and Hebron Governorates. Dozens of Palestinians were reportedly injured, including through the use of firearms, by settlers and ISF, and hundreds of homes and other buildings, as well as cars, were torched. Three Israeli soldiers suffered injuries after they were hit with stones. It was also reported that settlers established at least two new outposts in the past two days in the Jordan Valley and South Hebron Hills, near Palestinian communities which have been repeatedly attacked by settlers in the past months and are at imminent risk of being forcibly transferred from their homes and land. ... The Israeli Security Forces must immediately end their active participation in and support for settler attacks on Palestinians. Israeli authorities must instead prevent further attacks, including by bringing those responsible to account. Those reasonably suspected of criminal acts, including murder or other unlawful killings, must be brought to justice through a judicial process that complies with international human rights standards, following a prompt, impartial, independent, effective and transparent investigation.

Neither Palestinians nor Israelis should take the law into their own hands to exact revenge.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2024/04/turk-urges-all-states-act-over-crises-gaza-west-bank>

Israel/Gaza: UN experts condemn destruction of judicial infrastructure, call for protection of justice operators

UN experts today called for the protection of justice operators in Israel and condemned the destruction of judicial infrastructure in Gaza.

The experts deplored reports that on 9 October 2023 the Israeli army bombed the building which housed the local headquarters of the Palestine Bar Association, resulting in the destruction of its official archives.

On 4 December 2023, the Israeli army released a video showing the complete blasting of the building of Gaza's empty courthouse, seized in November 2023.

"The right to a fair trial and access to justice require adequate infrastructure and efficient protection for all actors in the administration of justice, as well as for case files and

documentation. We are alarmed by this unnecessary destruction of the judicial infrastructure in Gaza,” the experts said.

The experts noted that since early October 2023, Israeli lawyers, including Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, who opposed the ongoing Israeli attack in Gaza or who have spoken in defense of Palestinian rights, have encountered harassment from other members of the legal profession and were the subject of complaints to the Israeli Bar Association for their public speech. ...

On October 12, the Israeli Bar Association emailed all registered lawyers stating that the National Ethics Committee would have “zero tolerance” for any lawyer publishing content on personal social media accounts perceived to be “incitement to violence”, and that the Committee would pursue legal action against such lawyers. The letter did not specify what statements would amount to such “incitement to violence”, having a chilling effect on the freedom of expression of lawyers.

On 18 October, the Deputy Chairman of the Israel Bar Association posted on social media that the Bar Association Ethics Committee had submitted new emergency regulations to the Minister of Justice, apparently granting the Committee authority to immediately suspend lawyers suspected of “supporting terrorism”.

“We are concerned that the Bar Association’s email was, in fact, a stifling of speech in support of Palestinian rights or opposition to the attacks in Gaza from those in the legal profession,” the experts said. ...

The experts regretted that elected and appointed Israeli officials have released derogatory statements against Israeli judges following their decisions to release individuals unduly detained for their statements or activism in favour of Palestinians’ rights. ...

For example, Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel’s Minister of National Security, labeled a judge a “domestic enemy” on social media after he ordered the release of an individual who posted images on social media that appeared to approve of the 7 October attack by Hamas, on grounds that such posts did not justify detention. In another case, Minister Ben-Gvir claimed on social media that a judge was an “enemy from within” following his order to release an Israeli activist who was detained after police discovered Palestinian flags during a search of the activist’s home. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/israelgaza-un-experts-condemn-destruction-judicial-infrastructure-call>

Gaza: UN experts deplore use of purported AI to commit ‘domicide’ in Gaza, call for reparative approach to rebuilding

UN experts today deplored the purported use of artificial intelligence (AI) and related military directives by Israel in occupied Gaza leading to an unprecedented toll on the civilian population, housing, vital services and infrastructure.

“Six months into the current military offensive, more housing and civilian infrastructure has now been destroyed in Gaza as a percentage, compared to any conflict in memory,” they said. ... And this comes on top of systematic demolitions of Palestinian homes over decades of occupation and previous bombardments.”

According to the experts, the systematic and widespread destruction of housing, services and civilian infrastructure represents a crime against humanity, a [domicide](#), as well as numerous war crimes and acts of genocide as described by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territory in her recent [report](#) to the Human Rights Council. With Israeli public officials joining calls for Palestinians to leave Gaza, to “take back Gaza” to build settlements again, and ostensible enthusiasm expressed by prominent former US government officials for “Gaza beachfront” properties, there is little doubt that Israel’s intent goes far beyond the purposes of military defeat of Hamas, they noted.

“If proven true, the shocking revelations of the use of AI systems by the Israeli military such as “Gospel”, “Lavender” and “Where's Daddy?”, combined with lowered human due diligence to avoid or minimise civilian casualties and infrastructure, contribute to explaining the extent of the death toll and home destruction in Gaza,” the experts said. ...

“We are especially concerned about the alleged use of AI to target ‘family homes’ of suspected Hamas operatives, typically at night when they sleep, with unguided munitions known as ‘dumb’ bombs, with little regard for civilians who may be in or around that home,” they said.

They also expressed grave concern about the practice of bombing so-called “power targets” such as large, high rise residential and public buildings ...

Between 60-70% of all homes in Gaza, and up to 84% of homes in northern Gaza, are either fully destroyed or partly damaged. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/gaza-un-experts-deplore-use-purported-ai-commit-domicide-gaza-call>

UN Women

Scarcity and Fear: A Gender Analysis of the Impact of the War in Gaza on Vital Services Essential to Women’s and Girls’ Health, Safety, and Dignity - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/gender-alert-gender-analysis-of-the-impact-of-the-war-in-gaza-on-vital-services-essential-to-womens-and-girls-health-safety-en.pdf>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

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

Criminal Justice Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3511>

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

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill>

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

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

TOP

Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 3 days**

European Commission: 1st progress report of the EU antisemitism strategy

(closing date 19 April 2024)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14204-1st-progress-report-of-the-EU-antisemitism-strategy_en

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator: Charity banking challenges survey 2024

(closing date 15 May 2024)

<https://www.oscr.org.uk/news/have-your-say-charity-banking-challenges-survey-2024/>

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