

Introduction

I am originally from Gaza, Palestine, and currently reside in [REDACTED]. Many of my family members continue to live in Gaza.

I feel compelled to provide evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the initiative to examine this complex and enduring conflict is commendable, the framing of the issue in the Chair's statement raises significant concerns. Highlighting the specific number of Israeli casualties while vaguely referencing "tens of thousands" of Palestinian deaths risks perpetuating injustice by minimising the catastrophic toll on Palestinian lives. **As of 30 December 2024, 45,441 Palestinians have been killed, including 108,338 in Gaza, over just 451 days of Genocide, according to the Palestinian health ministry .** These statistics demand clear acknowledgment, as they highlight the disproportionate human suffering endured by Palestinians.

Also Gaza population declines by 6% amid Israel's genocidal war, according to official figures

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/gaza-population-declines-by-6-amid-israel-s-genocidal-war/3438769>

The UK holds a unique position in this conflict due to its historical ties to Palestine during the British Mandate, its role in issuing the Balfour Declaration, and its contemporary diplomatic and strategic relationships in the region. This submission addresses the following key areas:

1. The UK's potential role in facilitating a ceasefire.
2. Lessons to be learned from past UK policies on the conflict.
3. Strategies for ensuring resilient peace efforts amidst global uncertainties.

By focusing on these aspects, I aim to underscore the moral and political responsibility of the UK in promoting a just and lasting resolution to this conflict.

1. What can – and should – the UK do, in cooperation with regional and international partners, to help bring about a ceasefire?

The UK, as a founding member of the United Nations and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, holds immense influence in shaping international policy. However, its actions and inactions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often suggest a lack of decisive commitment to justice and peace.

The UK's Historical Responsibility

The Balfour Declaration of 1917 marked the beginning of the UK's involvement in shaping the future of Palestine. While the Declaration promised a homeland for Jewish people, it also stated that

“nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” Despite this assurance, the rights of Palestinians have been systematically eroded over decades. The UK must now reckon with its historical role and take corrective measures to address the injustices resulting from its policies during the Mandate period and beyond.

Contemporary Failures and Bias

Since October 2023, the UK has demonstrated significant bias in its approach to the conflict. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have made multiple visits to Israeli officials in Jerusalem—recognised as occupied territory under international law—but have not made any visits to Gaza. This lack of engagement with the Palestinian side undermines the UK’s credibility as a neutral mediator. It is noteworthy that international organisations like UNICEF, the United Nations, and even NHS doctors have visited Gaza. Moreover, the Qatari Foreign Minister visited Gaza on 26 November 2023. Such visits are both feasible and necessary. www.mofa.gov.qa/en/qatar/latest-articles/latest-news/details/1445/05/12/qatari-diplomatic-delegation-arrives-in-gaza-to-oversee-entry-delivery-of-qatari-aid

Additionally, the UK government raised the Israeli flag on government buildings during the conflict but refused to show solidarity with Palestinians. The Prime Minister and most cabinet ministers wore the yellow Israeli symbol to show support for Israel. However, no such action was taken to acknowledge the suffering of Palestinians, such as attending Gaza Memorial Day events or wearing the Gaza Memorial Day symbol. This symbol, inspired by Palestinian children in Gaza who write their names on their arms to ensure identification if killed in airstrikes, reflects the stark reality of their lives. www.gazamemorialday.com

Action Steps for the UK

To help bring about a ceasefire, the UK must:

1. **Take Actions Now:** High-level UK officials should visit Gaza within weeks, delivering a clear message that the war must end immediately. This visit would signal solidarity with all victims and highlight the UK’s commitment to stopping the war.
2. **Sanctions and Accountability:** The UK should impose targeted sanctions on Israeli officials responsible for war crimes. The Prime Minister stated on 14 October 2024 that this idea was under consideration, but no action has been taken so far. Former Prime Minister David Cameron also considered such measures but similarly failed to act. Additionally, British-Israeli soldiers fighting in Gaza must be held accountable under UK law. www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2024/10/16/keir-starmer-said-at-pmqs-that-hes-looking-at-sanctions-on-israeli-ministers/
3. **Use Diplomatic Leverage:** As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the UK must advocate for binding resolutions that call for an immediate ceasefire and the protection of civilians.
4. **Support Humanitarian Efforts:** Facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, ensuring that food, medical supplies, and essential services reach those in need. The UK’s hospital in Gaza is a commendable step, but it has significant limitations. With fewer than 30 beds, it is unable to provide the critical operations desperately needed. Additionally, the hospital often closes during Israeli bombardments, further diminishing its capacity to serve those in urgent need.
5. **Act on Legal Advice:** The UK government’s lawyers have stated that Israel is breaking international law. Concrete actions must follow this legal determination.

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

6. **Avoid Inaction Similar to the EU:** Unlike the EU's passive stance, the UK must take decisive measures rather than simply acknowledging human rights violations without action. www.reuters.com/world/eu-will-not-suspend-dialogue-with-israel-polands-sikorski-says-2024-11-18/
7. **End the UK-Israel Roadmap 2023:** This roadmap must be reevaluated to ensure it does not perpetuate violations of international law.
8. **Reconsider Trade Agreements:** Trade agreements that enable the occupation and economic benefits derived from illegal settlements must be halted.

The UK has the power and influence to advocate for an immediate end to the violence. Failing to act decisively would perpetuate suffering and further erode the UK's standing as a global advocate for peace and human rights.

2. What can be learned from the record of UK Government policies to date?

The UK's policies on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reveal a pattern of complicity and missed opportunities for justice. These policies have often prioritised economic and political alliances over human rights, undermining the UK's credibility as a mediator.

Support for the Occupation

The UK has actively supported Israel through arms sales and trade agreements, including the import of products from illegal settlements on Palestinian land. The UK-Israel 2023 Roadmap, which mandates collaboration between UK institutions and Israel, further entrenches this support by penalising those who fail to comply with these partnerships. This policy demonstrates the UK's prioritisation of economic ties with Israel over adherence to international law.

Symbolic Bias

UK leaders have worn Israeli symbols in solidarity with Israel but have refused to do the same for Palestinians. Moreover, while Israeli hostages have received significant attention from UK officials, Palestinian hostage families cannot leave Gaza to share their stories. Those abroad are often afraid to speak up, fearing targeted campaigns from pro-Israeli media and organisations. These outlets frequently portray marches in support of Palestine as "hate marches," creating a hostile environment for Palestinian advocacy.

Influence of Pro-Israel Lobby Groups

The UK media and political discourse have been heavily influenced by pro-Israel lobby groups, which often police narratives and stifle criticism of Israel. The government's consistent alignment with these groups has reinforced public perceptions of bias and hindered honest discussions about the conflict.

Human Rights and Apartheid

Reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have categorised Israel's treatment of Palestinians as apartheid and genocide in Gaza. The UK has failed to adequately address these findings, often dismissing or downplaying their significance.

Calling for Elections in Palestine

Palestinians have not held a general election since 2006. In 2021, Israel blocked plans for elections in Palestine, further eroding democratic processes. The lack of elections contributes to political

stagnation and disenfranchisement. If elections had been held, it might have reduced the likelihood of blockades or escalations into genocidal violence, which have resulted in nearly 50,000 Palestinian deaths in Gaza alone.

For example, in January 2006, the Israeli government only reluctantly allowed Palestinians to vote in East Jerusalem. This precedent shows that the international community, including the UK, has failed to consistently support Palestinian self-determination. www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jan/16/israel

Ensuring freedom of expression is upheld when addressing pro-Palestine individuals in the UK is essential.

UK students have been arrested, harassed, put on trial, and dismissed from their studies in many universities simply for standing in solidarity with Palestine and urging their institutions to stop using university labs to develop weapons that harm Palestinians. Additionally, many individuals have been stopped at airports, while others have been dismissed from their jobs. Disturbingly, even the family of Palestinian-British doctor Dr. Abu Sitta was visited by UK police for investigation while he was treating patients in Gaza. The chilling effect of these policies is immense.

Lessons to Be Learned

1. **Stop Arms and Trade Policies:** The UK must end its arms trade with Israel to ensure it does not contribute to human rights violations. Similarly, trade agreements must exclude goods from illegal settlements.
2. **Adopt Balanced Symbolic Actions:** The UK should demonstrate equal solidarity with all victims of the conflict, ensuring that symbolic gestures reflect impartiality.
3. **Promote Independent Media:** The UK must resist pressure from lobby groups and support independent reporting on the conflict to foster informed public discourse.

By addressing these shortcomings, the UK can align its policies with its stated commitment to justice and human rights.

3. How can the UK assure the resilience of efforts to bring about a lasting peace at a time of uncertainty caused by conflicts elsewhere and changes in leadership in the international community?

Resilient peace requires addressing the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not merely managing its symptoms. The occupation of Palestinian territories, as ruled illegal by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), lies at the heart of this issue.

Systemic Injustices

- **Refugees:** Millions of Palestinians live as refugees, denied their right of return. This issue must be addressed as part of any lasting peace process.
- **Jerusalem:** Palestinians in Jerusalem face systemic aggression and violence from Israeli settlers and authorities. Their rights to live and worship freely must be protected.
- **West Bank:** Palestinians endure apartheid policies, land confiscation, and forced displacement. These practices contravene international law and perpetuate instability.

- **Gaza:** Under siege since 2006, Gaza now faces genocide, with over 100,000 injured, hospitals bombed, and basic necessities denied. The humanitarian situation is catastrophic and must be addressed urgently.

ICJ Findings

The ICJ has repeatedly affirmed the illegality of Israel's occupation. Its 2004 advisory opinion declared that the construction of the separation wall and Israeli settlements violate international law. In 2024, the ICJ reiterated these findings, calling on Israel to end its occupation immediately and urging all states to refrain from recognising or supporting these illegal practices.

Calling for Elections in Palestine

Palestinians have not been able to hold elections for over 15 years, largely due to external interference and Israeli restrictions. The UK must advocate for and facilitate democratic elections in Palestine. Free and fair elections are essential to restoring political legitimacy and empowering Palestinian governance.

Recommendations for the UK

1. **End Complicity in Occupation:** The UK must cease collaboration with Israeli officials advocating for actions such as forced displacement of Palestinians. Sanctions should be imposed on those responsible for war crimes.
2. **Support Palestinian Sovereignty:** Advocate for democratic elections and governance reforms in Palestine, ensuring that Palestinians can exercise self-determination. The UK must also oppose actions that undermine Palestinian sovereignty, such as settlement expansions.
3. **Facilitate Humanitarian Aid:** People in Gaza are dying due to the Israeli army's blockade, which prevents the delivery of food and medical supplies. From the first day of the war, Israeli officials stated their intention to evacuate Gaza, cut off food and water, and one minister even suggested the use of nuclear weapons on Gaza. The UK must work with international partners to provide immediate relief to the population and support UNRWA. It is worth noting that six years ago, Donald Trump halted funding to UNRWA, and similar policies may persist, further endangering the organisation's vital work.
4. **Prioritise Northern Gaza:** Priority should be given to establishing field hospitals and providing medical and food supplies in Northern Gaza, where the need is most urgent. Israel is weaponising food, as reported by UN agencies, to exert further pressure on the population.
5. **Expand the UK's Hospital in Gaza:** While the UK's hospital in Gaza is a commendable step, it has significant limitations, with fewer than 30 beds and no capacity for critical operations. Furthermore, it often shuts down during Israeli bombardments. Expanding this initiative would demonstrate a stronger commitment to humanitarian support.
6. **Promote Accountability:** The UK must support the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other international mechanisms to hold Israel accountable for its violations of international law. Additionally, the UK should recognise and enforce the findings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding Israel's occupation and ensure accountability at all levels.

A Vision for Lasting Peace

Lasting peace cannot be achieved without justice. Palestinians must be allowed to live dignified lives, free from occupation, apartheid, and systemic oppression. A just resolution to the conflict must include recognition of Palestinian sovereignty, the right of return for refugees, and equal rights for all.

The UK must take a leading role in advocating for a two-state solution that guarantees Palestinian self-determination and addresses the root causes of the conflict.

Conclusion

The UK's historical connections and current influence in the Middle East position it uniquely to facilitate a just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By acknowledging historical contexts, addressing systemic injustices, and upholding international law, the UK can contribute to a lasting and equitable peace.

30th December 2024