

The British Palestinian Committee

1. The British Palestinian Committee (BPC) is an organisation of British Palestinians representing a broad and diverse range of experience and expertise, advocating for Palestinian rights by ensuring that British-Palestinian voices are integral to public discourse and policymaking on Palestine. We are an independent organisation that is not affiliated with any particular political party, religion, or ideology in Palestine or the UK. For more information, please see our website – <https://britpalcommittee.co.uk/>

Executive Summary

2. Almost fifteen months have passed since Israel began its most devastating assault on Gaza to date. Scholars estimate the true death toll to be close to 200,000 – almost 10% of the territory's population.
3. While the scale and intensity of Israel's current assault on the Palestinian people may be unprecedented, the present reality is not the result of a conflict between two warring states, competing ethnic claims, or a religious battle. Such framings obscure the legal fact that Israel is an occupying power, and its actions are carried out against an occupied people.
4. Since the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the UK has played a pivotal role in the colonisation of Palestine. In particular, the British Mandate period (1920-1948) has had an enduring legacy.
5. Following the commencement of Israel's most recent assault on Gaza, in October 2023 – widely characterised by leading legal experts, human rights organisations, and UN bodies as genocide – successive UK governments have continued to provide diplomatic and military support to the state of Israel, enabling and contributing to a litany of war crimes.
6. In the face of Israel's genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people, the UK government must act to bring the Israeli assault on Gaza to an immediate and permanent end by applying diplomatic and economic sanctions as obligated by international law.
7. It is imperative that UK ministers actively support the South African submission at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the genocide case against Israel, and pursue the arrest and prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC) of Israeli officials for war crimes and crimes against humanity.
8. The UK must immediately cease provision of military support to Israel – including through its logistical support of weapons transfers to the Israeli military, and, furthermore, through surveillance flights – suspend all 350 arms export licences, and impose a two-way arms embargo.

9. The UK should drop the 2030 roadmap for UK-Israel bilateral relations, and impose economic and diplomatic sanctions in order to apply pressure on Israel to abide by its international obligations as set out, inter alia, in the ICJ Advisory Opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's prolonged occupation.
10. A just and lasting resolution in Palestine must have Palestinian self-determination at its core, taking into deep consideration the perspectives of those most affected.
11. For the Palestinian people to achieve self-determination, regardless of what specific form that eventually takes, the immediate steps are clear, and begin with the international community holding Israel accountable as an occupying power responsible for crimes against an occupied people.
12. If the UK government is truly committed to universal values of liberty, justice, and the rule of international law, and intends to bring about a lasting peace in Palestine and across the region, then this government must join the bulk of the international community, and seize this historic opportunity to play a crucial role in restoring the freedom and dignity of the Palestinian people.
13. Failure to change course urgently will present the UK with legal, reputational, and financial risks, as well as threaten the rule of international law, and will continue to contribute to the massacre of yet more Palestinian women, men, and children.

Introduction

14. Almost fifteen months have passed since Israel began its most devastating assault on Gaza to date. Every facet of Palestinian life has been targeted, displacing a majority-refugee population of approximately 2 million people. Scholars estimate the true death toll to be close to 200,000 – almost 10% of the territory's population.¹ The clear intent of Israel to eliminate the social and civic fabric of the Palestinian people has led Palestinians to compare this genocide to their original mass ethnic cleansing in 1947 and 1948, describing it as a "second Nakba".
15. According to the latest data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the Palestinian government, at time of writing, Israeli attacks have destroyed or damaged more than half of Gaza's homes and 80% of commercial facilities. At least 87% of school buildings and all of the university campuses have been damaged or destroyed, denying over 600,000 students an education.² Only 17 out of 36 hospitals are partially functioning, with 68% of road networks and 68% of agricultural areas damaged.³
16. Israel's crimes against humanity stretch beyond Gaza, with over 7,000 Palestinian casualties in the occupied West Bank since October 2023.⁴ Thousands more are

¹ [Counting the dead in Gaza: difficult but essential | The Lancet](#)

² [UN experts deeply concerned over 'scholasticide' in Gaza | OHCHR](#)

³ [Israel-Gaza war in maps and charts | Al Jazeera](#)

detained in cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions – in what Jerusalem-based human rights organisation, B'Tselem, has termed a “network of torture camps”.⁵ From 28 August 2024, Israel escalated its offensive in the north of the West Bank, with dozens of Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks on Jenin, Tulkarem, and Tubas.

17. While the scale and intensity of Israel’s current assault on the Palestinian people may be unprecedented, the present reality is not the result of a conflict between two warring states, competing ethnic claims, or a religious battle. Such framings obscure the legal fact that Israel is an occupying power, and its actions are carried out against an occupied people. In fact, today’s assault takes place within a long history of atrocities that define the Palestinian people’s experience of over a century of settler colonialism in their homeland.

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

18. Since the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the UK has played a pivotal role in the colonisation of Palestine. In particular, the British Mandate period (1920-1948) has had an enduring legacy.
19. One example is the techniques of colonial oppression taught directly by British army officers to prominent figures within the Zionist political and military leadership during the late 1930s, before the establishment of the state of Israel, which inform present-day operations of Israeli occupying forces.⁶
20. The UK’s living legacy of colonialism in Palestine continues today in its enduring commitment of material assistance and diplomatic cover for Israel’s crimes against the Palestinian people.
21. Even before October 2023, successive Conservative governments not only shielded Israel from accountability but rewarded violations and abuses with yet greater support. The military cooperation agreement with Israel, made in 2020 during Boris Johnson’s premiership,⁷ was extended in March 2023 by Rishi Sunak’s administration with the “2030 roadmap for UK-Israel bilateral relations”, aimed at deepening military, economic, and technological ties.⁸
22. Following the commencement of Israel’s most recent assault on Gaza, in October 2023 – widely characterised by leading legal experts, human rights organisations, and UN bodies as genocide – successive UK governments have continued to provide diplomatic and military support to the state of Israel, enabling and contributing to a litany of war crimes.

⁴ [Israel-Gaza war in maps and charts | Al Jazeera](#)

⁵ [Welcome to Hell: The Israeli Prison System as a Network of Torture Camps | B'Tselem](#)

⁶ [Rashid Khalidi, The Neck and The Sword | New Left Review](#)

⁷ [UK and Israel sign military cooperation agreement | The UK Defence Journal](#)

⁸ [2030 roadmap for UK-Israel bilateral relations | Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office](#)

23. The actions of successive governments on arms exports are clear violations of UK official policy, as outlined in the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria (SELC).⁹ Rishi Sunak's administration hinted that Israel's actions, in particular its ground offensive in Rafah, presented a risk of violations of international humanitarian law.¹⁰ A full acknowledgement that this was the case only came from the new Labour administration in September 2024, following a review commissioned by foreign secretary David Lammy.¹¹ Yet, on the back of that review, the Labour government implemented just a partial suspension of approximately 30 out of 350 arms export licences. This inadequate, inconsistent decision confirms the continuation of the preceding administration's failure to abide by the SELC.
24. The UK's military support for Israel stretches beyond the continued approval of export licences. This active assistance to Israel includes supplying spare parts for the maintenance of F-35 fighter jets, procuring arms from the Israeli military industry, and supplying Israel with weapons, personnel, and intelligence through British military bases in Cyprus.¹²
25. Such acts violate international law and ignore the vast majority of the British public's views in the process,¹³ with only 13% standing by the continued sale of arms to Israel, while 73% support an immediate ceasefire.¹⁴

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

26. In the face of Israel's genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people, the UK government must act to bring the Israeli assault on Gaza to an immediate and permanent end by applying diplomatic and economic sanctions as obligated by international law.
27. Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as a specific set of acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. These include: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.¹⁵
28. Palestinians have been subjected to such abject horrors over the past year at the hands of Israel. According to a letter published in The Lancet medical journal in early July 2024, the true death toll of Israel's military campaign in Gaza at that time – given

⁹ [Strategic Export Licensing Criteria | UK Parliament](#)

¹⁰ [UK to consider suspending arms exports to Israel if Rafah offensive goes ahead | The Guardian](#)

¹¹ [UK policy on arms export licences to Israel: Foreign Secretary's statement | GOV.UK](#)

¹² [Revealed: UK military has flown 200 spy missions over Gaza in support of Israel | Declassified UK](#)

¹³ [Sympathies for the Israelis Palestinian conflict | YouGov](#)

¹⁴ [New poll shows sustained British public support for immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the suspension of UK arms sales to Israel | Medical Aid for Palestinians](#)

¹⁵ [Explainer: What is the Genocide Convention? | UN News](#)

that official figures do not include the thousands killed who are buried under rubble, or the indirect deaths due to destruction of health facilities, food distribution systems and other public infrastructure – came close to 200,000, or almost 10% of the population.¹⁶ The WHO has reported that hundreds of thousands of cases of hepatitis A, jaundice, scabies, impetigo, and acute respiratory tract infections have been recorded.¹⁷ A new abbreviation has been coined which speaks to the heinous nature of Israel’s assault on the Palestinian people: Wounded Child, No Surviving Family (WCNSF).

29. In the provisional measures handed down on 26 January 2024 by the ICJ in South Africa’s genocide case against Israel, the court concluded that “in view of the fundamental values sought to be protected by the Genocide Convention, the plausible rights in question [...] are of such a nature that prejudice to them is capable of causing irreparable harm”, and there exists “a real and imminent risk that irreparable prejudice would be caused to those rights before [the court] gives its final decision.”¹⁸ Israel has since directly contravened repeated orders of the ICJ to prevent and put an end to genocidal acts.
30. The risk of genocide that the ICJ outlined in three orders since January 2024 generate an obligation on the UK, as a party to the Genocide Convention, to discharge its obligation to prevent the commission of genocide in Gaza. Accordingly, it is imperative that UK ministers actively support the South African submission at the ICJ in the genocide case against Israel, and pursue the arrest and prosecution by the ICC of Israeli officials for war crimes and crimes against humanity.
31. Over the past decade, the UK has granted over 1,000 standard export licences, worth around £0.5bn, with at least a further 61 “open licences” granted with an unlimited value. These include components and durability testing for the F-35 stealth bomber aircraft, which has been used throughout Israel’s assault on Gaza to kill countless Palestinians. The new government’s decision, in September 2024, to suspend approximately 30 out of 350 arms export licences to Israel demonstrates an acknowledgement that Israel is violating international humanitarian law. A partial suspension is therefore inadequate, inconsistent, and confirms the UK’s repeated failure to fulfil its basic obligations under international law. Partial suspensions, reviews and invented distinctions about the use of weapons will not change these straightforward responsibilities. Indeed, the government’s choice to ignore the mounting evidence of the use of weapons built in the UK in the commission of genocide demonstrates its complicity, as well as its failure to discharge its duty under the Genocide Convention to prevent genocide.
32. The UK must immediately cease provision of military support to Israel – including through its logistical support of weapons transfers to the Israeli military, and,

¹⁶ [Counting the dead in Gaza: difficult but essential | The Lancet](#)

¹⁷ [Infectious diseases are being allowed to run rampant in Gaza | The BMJ](#)

¹⁸ [Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip \(South Africa v. Israel\) | ICJ](#)

furthermore, through surveillance flights – suspend all 350 arms export licences, and impose a two-way arms embargo.

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?

33. Across the international community there has been a growing consensus on the extent to which Israel's actions against the Palestinian people are in contravention of international humanitarian law, constitute crimes against humanity, and form the basis of the wider regional instability.
34. Since its commencement in December 2023, 31 states have expressed support for South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the ICJ. At least eleven countries have severed diplomatic ties or recalled their ambassadors to Israel, in response to its assault on Gaza.
35. In November 2023, the UK joined Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, and the Netherlands in filing a declaration of intervention in the case brought by The Gambia against Myanmar at the ICJ, regarding allegations over violations of the Genocide Convention. The 21-page intervention argued for an expansive definition of genocide, including a lower threshold when damage is inflicted upon children.¹⁹ Since October 2023, Israeli forces have been responsible for the killing of almost 17,500 children in Gaza alone.²⁰
36. In a separate case, the ICJ Advisory Opinion handed down on 19 July 2024 set out the illegality of Israel's occupation, concluding that it is in breach of Article 3 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which binds states parties to "undertake to prevent, prohibit and eradicate" all practices of "racial segregation and apartheid".²¹ The court stated that Israel is under the obligation to withdraw its occupying forces from the territories, immediately cease settlement expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and make "full reparation for the damage caused by its internationally wrongful acts".
37. Under international law, the UK government's *erga omnes* obligations (obligations binding on all states) require it not to aid or assist Israel in committing unlawful acts. This includes obligations, set out in paragraph 278 of the ICJ Advisory Opinion, around abstaining from treaty relations, as well as from economic, trade or investment dealings with Israel, which may entrench its unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory.²²

¹⁹ [UK accused of hypocrisy in not backing claim of genocide in Gaza before ICJ | The Guardian](#)

²⁰ [Israel-Gaza war in maps and charts | Al Jazeera](#)

²¹ [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination | OHCHR](#)

²² [Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies And Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem | ICJ](#)

38. At the UN General Assembly vote on 18 September 2024 regarding the Palestinian-drafted resolution supporting the ICJ ruling, which passed 124 votes to 14, the UK chose to abstain.²³ Nonetheless, in her speech explaining the UK's position, the Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Barbara Woodward, claimed that the UK did "support the central findings of the ICJ's Advisory Opinion", despite having abstained on the vote.²⁴ Minister for the Middle East, Hamish Falconer MP, in response to a written parliamentary question, also confirmed the UK "does not disagree with the central findings of the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion".²⁵
39. By opposing South Africa's case at the ICJ, and abstaining in the vote at the UN General Assembly supporting the ICJ ruling, as well as abstaining on a resolution at the UN Security Council in December 2023 demanding an immediate ceasefire – which was supported by all other Security Council members, apart from the US – the UK government has shown itself to be out of step with the bulk of the international community.
40. Accordingly, the UK should drop the 2030 roadmap for UK-Israel bilateral relations, and impose economic and diplomatic sanctions in order to apply pressure on Israel to abide by its international obligations as set out, inter alia, in the ICJ Advisory Opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's prolonged occupation.
41. A just and lasting resolution in Palestine must have Palestinian self-determination at its core, taking into deep consideration the perspectives of those most affected. This includes approximately 5 million Palestinians living under military occupation and blockade in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, 1.9 million subjected to second class citizenship and a raft of discriminatory laws within the State of Israel, and an estimated 7 million living as refugees or in exile, including British Palestinians.
42. For the Palestinian people to achieve self-determination, regardless of what specific form that eventually takes, the immediate steps are clear, and begin with the international community holding Israel accountable as an occupying power responsible for crimes against an occupied people.
43. If the UK government is truly committed to universal values of liberty, justice, and the rule of international law, and intends to bring about a lasting peace in Palestine and across the region, then this government must join the bulk of the international community, and seize this historic opportunity to play a crucial role in restoring the freedom and dignity of the Palestinian people.

²³ [General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Historic Text Demanding Israel End Its Unlawful Presence, Policies in Occupied Palestinian Territory within One Year | UN](#)

²⁴ [The UK's explanation of vote on the UN General Assembly resolution on the ICJ's Advisory Opinion on Israel's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories | Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office](#)

²⁵ [Question 10451 for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office | UK Parliament](#)

44. Failure to change course urgently will present the UK with legal, reputational, and financial risks, as well as threaten the rule of international law, and will continue to contribute to the massacre of yet more Palestinian women, men, and children.

45. As Mohan Pieris, the Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, said, when presenting the Committee's 56th report, detailing "the apocalyptic situation for Palestinians", on 19 November 2024:

We have been permitting the clock to turn back to an era of unchecked barbarity – the very persecution we once vowed would never happen again – now permitted under the guise of technological precision, the manipulation of international law, and insidious disinformation. Our inaction is not only failing to protect innocent lives from the ravages of war; it is unravelling the international legal system itself – a framework painstakingly built to protect peace and security for all. [...] As I present this report, I urge each and every one of you: do not turn a deaf ear. History will not forgive or forget our inaction and complicity.²⁶

31st December 2024

²⁶ [A genocide is unfolding before our eyes: History will not forgive our inaction, UN Special Committee warns General Assembly in report | OHCHR](#)