

Written evidence submitted by FCDO for FAC inquiry into Israeli Palestinian conflict, January 2025 (IPC0097)

Summary

Since 5 July we have:

- Called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, recognising that there can be no military solution to this conflict.
- Used our Presidency of the UN Security Council in November to maintain international focus on this crisis. The Foreign Secretary led a meeting of the UN Security Council on 18 November specifically focussed on “ending the war and securing durable peace.”
- The UK voted in favour of a draft resolution tabled on 19 November 2024 calling for an immediate, unconditional ceasefire and immediate, unconditional release of hostages. On 11 December, we voted in favour of two UN General Assembly resolutions on Gaza and UNRWA. On 11 December, the Prime Minister met with the UNRWA Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini, outlining the UK’s resolute support to the agency and announcing an additional £13 million for UNRWA.
- Since July, the Foreign Secretary has visited Israel and the OPTs twice, first within nine days of taking office and then with his French counterpart. The development minister has visited Jordan in August and Israel and the OPTs in December.
- Reinstated funding for UNRWA. Since July, the UK has now announced £41 million for UNRWA, providing vital services to civilians in Gaza, the West Bank and Palestinian refugees across the region. This includes: £13 million to support UNRWA's flash humanitarian appeal for Gaza; and £28 million for UNRWA's programme budget (£1 million of which is earmarked to help UNRWA implement the recommendations from Colonna's report on UNRWA neutrality).
- Suspended relevant export licences to Israel for use in military operations in Gaza, following a review which concluded there is a clear risk that UK export items might be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of IHL.
- Imposed sanctions against those perpetrating and inciting human rights abuses against Palestinian communities in the West Bank; and, since July, sanctioned three illegal outposts and four organisations.
- Condemned reports of sexual violence on and since October 7 and deployed a team of experts to help support the work of national and international bodies and NGOs in responding to conflict-related sexual violence.
- Begun planning for the ‘next phase’ in Gaza, preparing to take a leading role in this progress.
- Begun convening partners on the financing and coordination of recovery and reconstruction, to ensure donor support is coordinated and effective.

We have continued to:

- Work for the immediate release of all hostages and used all diplomatic avenues available to us to press for an immediate ceasefire.
- Support hostage talks and the efforts of the US, Egyptian and Qatari negotiators to bring the conflict to an end. The Foreign Secretary has met or spoken with all the families of UK-linked hostages. The Minister for the Middle East met the families of UK-linked hostages on 19 August and on 3 December and has raised the plight of

the hostages consistently with the Israeli Ambassador, and with former Israeli Foreign Minister Katz on 2 October.

- Steer an informal contact group of key Foreign Ministers known as the “Quint plus Quint”, with meetings in Riyadh and New York.
- Press to get as much aid into Gaza as possible. The UK trebled its aid commitment to the OPTs last financial year and has now announced over £112m in funding in the OPTs this financial year.
- Through UK support, over 550,000 people in Gaza have been able to access essential healthcare, 647,000 have received food, and 284,000 have accessed essential water, sanitation and hygiene services. UK Forces have conducted 11 relief airdrops through a Jordan-led international air coalition, and we’ve delivered tens of thousands of tents, relief supplies and response vehicles through maritime routes.
- Assist British nationals. **484** British nationals, their dependents, and other eligible persons (EPs) have been helped to leave Gaza.

Introduction

The Israeli Palestinian conflict remains one of the most enduring and complex conflicts in modern history, with deep-seated grievances on both sides. A resolution to the current conflict in Gaza is a priority for the UK Government. It is a source of deep frustration that efforts towards this have not yet succeeded.

We continue to push for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, better protection of civilians, a rapid increase of humanitarian aid, and for the UN and humanitarian agencies to be enabled to operate effectively and safely. We have consistently called on all sides to adhere to International Humanitarian Law.

Alongside the importance of a ceasefire in Gaza, we have stressed the need for greater stability across the West Bank and an irreversible pathway towards a Palestinian state, which will deliver a two-state solution.

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

1. Since 4 July, along with our partners and allies, we have been advocating for an immediate ceasefire and the release of all hostages held by Hamas, as this is the only sustainable option toward a peaceful resolution in this conflict. We believe securing a ceasefire is in the interests of both Israelis and Palestinians. We have supported the efforts of mediators to negotiate this. We continue to urge parties to return to, and remain at, the negotiation table in a meaningful way.
2. We have used a range of diplomatic channels – both privately and publicly - to lobby for and influence this outcome. We have led efforts at the G7 and G20 with statements calling on both parties to end the conflict and resume dialogue, as well as at the UN. The UK voted in favour of a draft resolution tabled on 19 November 2024 calling for an immediate, unconditional ceasefire and immediate, unconditional release of hostages. We used our Presidency of the UN Security Council in November 2024 to maintain international focus on this crisis. The Foreign Secretary led a meeting of the UN Security Council on 18 November specifically focussed on “ending the war and securing durable

peace.”

3. We have also consistently communicated these messages directly to the Israeli government, and to those with influence over Hamas. Since taking office in July, the Foreign Secretary has visited the region five times and spoken to his Israeli counterparts five times. The Prime Minister has met both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas and had further telephone conversations with each of them.
4. In the continued absence of a deal to end the fighting and free the hostages, the UK has been working with key allies, including the US, E3 and Arab partners, to prioritise four main areas to improve the situation on the ground to: i) address urgently the humanitarian crisis, including increasing humanitarian aid and the protection of civilians, ii) address settler violence and illegal settlement expansion in the West Bank, iii) coordinate with international partners on the Next Phase in Gaza, and iv) build a political horizon for the Palestinian people towards a two state solution which sees a viable Palestinian state alongside a safe and secure Israel.

Hostages

5. Hamas’ attack on 7 October was a horrific act of terror; the UK has maintained throughout this crisis that all hostages must be released immediately. Freeing the hostages has been a UK government priority from the outset and the UK government has strongly supported negotiations for the release of hostages taken during the conflict. This includes working with partners to apply diplomatic pressure on Hamas and facilitating dialogue that prioritises the safe return of hostages. Of the 253 hostages taken, 101 hostages, including dual British national Emily Damari and three hostages with strong UK links remain captive in Gaza. We continue to work alongside our allies and partners in the region, exercising every possible diplomatic lever to see them released immediately and unconditionally. Negotiations remain the best chance to get the hostages home to their loved ones and we urge both sides to show flexibility and return to the negotiation table.
6. In support of the ongoing hostage rescue activity, the UK Ministry of Defence conducts surveillance flights over the Eastern Mediterranean, including operating in airspace over Israel and Gaza. Surveillance aircraft are unarmed, do not have a combat role, and are tasked solely to locate hostages.
7. We have been providing ongoing support to British families affected and remain committed to doing as much as we can for their loved ones to be returned. Ensuring their release remains a top priority for the government and is central to ceasefire negotiation efforts.

Humanitarian Efforts

8. As part of our wider efforts, we have pushed for a significant increase in humanitarian aid to alleviate the suffering of the population on the ground in Gaza. While this in isolation will not deliver a ceasefire, it is essential. Under International Humanitarian Law, Israel has an obligation to allow the free passage of humanitarian relief. Winter has arrived, with heavy rain and flooding exacerbating an already desperate situation. We have been calling on Israel to strengthen five key areas of humanitarian support: i) to ensure an immediate effort to equip the population for winter, ii) to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, iii) to get much more aid and more types of goods into Gaza, iv) to allow

the UN, including UNRWA, to deliver its mandate, and v) to ensure humanitarian workers can do their jobs safely and effectively.

9. At the United Nations, we have demonstrated the impact of UK leadership to drive concerted international action. International pressure on Israel following a UK-convened emergency Security Council meeting on Polio led to Israel agreeing a pause in military operations to allow for vaccination rollout in September. We also used our November Presidency of the UN Security Council to keep humanitarian issues high on the agenda of the international community, including Lord Collins' chairing of a Security Council meeting on the IPC's warning of the risk of famine in Gaza on 12 November.
10. The Foreign Secretary, together with E3 Foreign Ministers, wrote to Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar to urge Israel to adopt the UN's 'winterisation' plan. This includes providing additional supplies such as blankets and clothing via aid shipments, access to reliable fuel sources, and resurfacing roads for commercial routes. E3 Ministers also urged Israel to respect the mandate of the UN and ensure its agencies, including UNRWA, can continue to operate safely and effectively in Gaza.
11. The UK has now committed £112 million to the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) this financial year, providing vital services to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, delivered through partner agencies. The UK's humanitarian programme in Gaza has meant half a million people have received essential healthcare, and 284,000 people have improved access to water, sanitation and hygiene services.

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

12. At the heart of UK policy is the consistent support for a two-state solution as the most viable way to resolve the conflict. As such, we have advocated for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel. We have been clear that the situation on the ground will only be solved by diplomatic means. These basic principles were set out in UNSCR 242 of 1967 and UNSCR 338 of 1973, the Madrid and Oslo processes of the 1990s. They were also reflected in the Quartet Principles on the Middle East.
13. Since 5 July the UK Government has sought to maintain a balanced approach, by recognising Israel's right to self-defence in accordance with international law, while also advocating for Palestinian rights and a pathway to statehood. This recognises the core concerns on both sides of the debate, neither of which can be ignored as we seek a lasting settlement. This is also crucial for maintaining credibility with both parties and fostering an environment conducive to dialogue and trust.
14. We have been consistent in our support for strengthening and reforming the Palestinian Authority, investing in capabilities which will form a future Palestinian state. We have supported the PA government to deliver essential services. We have also been consistent in condemning acts of violence from both sides and have emphasised the importance of adhering to international law, including UN resolutions, and the protection of human rights for all individuals in the region. We have continued to emphasise the importance of working with allies and regional partners to promote cooperation and dialogue, recognising the importance of regional support for a sustainable peace in the region. We have stressed the importance of engagement with civil society and non-state

actors who can help to bridge the divide between communities and build trust over time.

Increasing UK support in the West Bank & PA reform

15. We are of the clear view that Israel should bring an end to its presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as rapidly as possible. Every effort must be made to create the conditions for negotiations towards a two-state solution. We have also been clear that Israel's settlement expansion programme is illegal and counterproductive to the prospect of a two-state solution. Amongst our major partners, the UK has been at the forefront of imposing sanctions to defend human rights in the West Bank. On 15 October, the Government sanctioned three outposts, and four groups related to settler violence in the West Bank, under the Global Human Rights Regime. The US has followed our lead in sanctioning these groups. We will continue to show leadership and demonstrate the ability to influence others to act with us.
16. We have increased our practical support for a reformed and empowered Palestinian Authority, which will be vital in the delivery of lasting peace and progress towards a two-state solution. We welcome the Palestinian Authority's commitment to delivering reform and the UK is committed to supporting the Palestinian Prime Minister and his government in these efforts. We also provide support to the Palestinian Authority Security Forces through the British Support Team based in Ramallah, which carries out training and support activities.
17. We have stated our commitment to recognising a Palestinian state, at a time that will have the most impact in achieving this reality and will be most conducive to long-term prospects for peace.
18. The UK continues to consider the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion on Legal Consequence arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, very carefully, with the rigour and seriousness it deserves.
19. We continue to reflect on how, working with partners, we can do more to advance our core objectives to secure peace and a lasting political settlement in the region. We continue to use the full range of the UK's diplomatic and wider capabilities to pursue this.

C. 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?

20. Our approach will continue to be governed by the core objective of delivering a two-state solution, which allows Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security. We will continue to take a progressive realist approach to the region, and to aim for tangible improvements and change over time. This means we will use our position as a P5, G7 and G20 member; our close partnerships, including with the E3 and Gulf states; and building wider alliances, to make progress where it can be made, in spite of the challenging regional and global situation. Our immediate focus remains a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of all hostages.

West Bank Stability

21. We will continue to prioritise the stability of the West Bank and protection of the rights and livelihoods of Palestinians. A stable and secure West Bank is essential for any future Palestinian state to be viable. So, working with partners, we will continue to consider all options, including sanctions, for further action to address settler violence in the West Bank. Our recent joint statement with E3 partners on the urgent need to extend correspondent banking arrangements between Israeli and Palestinian banks, to prevent economic collapse in the OPTs, preceded Israel's decision to agree a one-year extension to indemnity. This demonstrates the impact of persistent, patient and concerted international engagement.

Israel's Security

22. We will always support Israel's right to self-defence within the boundaries of International Humanitarian Law, in particular in relation to the threat from Iran and its allies. We condemned Iran's attack on Israel on 1 October in the strongest terms, which exposed once again Iran's malign role in the region. We will continue to encourage the process of normalisation of relations with Israel within the region, following on from the positive legacy of the Abraham Accords.

Humanitarian support and the UN

23. As a P5 member of the UNSC, we remain committed to upholding the UN's mandate and that of its agencies, including UNRWA. Building on our Presidency of the UNSC in November 2024, we will continue to advocate in multilateral fora, and bilaterally with our partners, to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. This includes an ongoing focus on enabling the operations of UNRWA in the OPTs, as the only organisation which can deliver the scale and level of services required for civilians in Gaza and the wider region.

Post-conflict Gaza

24. We will continue to work with partners, including the US administration, on 'next phase' planning in Gaza. We will press for planning to be predicated on tangible progress towards a Palestinian state, that the PA's role must be front and centre, and that planning needs to advance security for both Gazans and Israelis.

25. We are clear that planning for recovery and eventual reconstruction must begin now, to be ready to deliver when the conditions allow. To support a joined-up and consistent donor response, we have already begun convening partners on the financing and coordination of recovery and reconstruction. Our priority remains to ensure that international efforts cohere around PA plans and the range of Gazans' needs, engaging with the G7, regional and Gulf partners. We are certain that Gaza's recovery and reconstruction should be Palestinian-led, support the future governance of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and maintain the viability of a future Palestinian State. As part of our commitment, we are currently funding two roles in the new PA reconstruction team.

26. We are clear that there can be no military solution to this conflict. A lasting peace and stability will only be possible through a diplomatic route.

8th January 2025