

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

23 December 2024

Executive summary:

In response to this call for evidence on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by the Foreign Affairs Committee, we provide evidence and policy recommendations in relation to the following questions (from the terms of reference):

1. What can – and should – the UK do, in cooperation with regional and international partners, to help bring about a ceasefire?
2. What can be learned from the record of UK Government policies to date?
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?

RESPONSE:

- We argue that the UK government should stand by its international commitments to prevent genocide, and cease any kind of military, economic and diplomatic support for Israel. Many international organisations have recognised Israel's actions towards Palestinians as a genocide and labelled the long term oppression of the Palestinians as apartheid. While the suspension of some military export licences is welcome, this does not go far enough.
- The UK should stop using the rhetoric of ensuring Israel's right to 'self-defence', and instead actively work towards a ceasefire which recognises the rights of Palestinian statehood and human rights. The UK's contribution in humanitarian aid to both Gaza and Lebanon have been nullified by a continuation of arms sales, until the suspension of some export licences in September 2024. Only by making clear that the UK cannot condone or support the genocidal actions of the Israeli leadership can the UK fulfil its international obligations and move towards a just stance on the conflict.

We call for the following policy recommendations to be considered by the UK government:

- A. Suspend all arms export licences to Israel from companies operating within the UK, as well as dual-use exports. No military or dual-use exports should be sent to a state that is committing genocide, in line with international law.
- B. Provide greater humanitarian aid to Gaza and Lebanon. Ensure that sanctions are imposed on any individuals or organisations that restrict aid flow.
- C. Reaffirm the UK's commitment to its obligations under international law, including our responsibility to abide by the Genocide Convention and commit to respecting International Criminal Court (ICC) rulings.
- D. Recognise and respect the State of Palestine in policy and decision-making.
- E. Increase diplomatic pressure on Israel, including economic sanctions on leaders responsible for war crimes. Continue and increase sanctions on illegal settlers in the West Bank.

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About the research group/project name: Just Statistics

Just Statistics is a research group within the University of Southampton ([Just Statistics Critical Quantitative Data Research Group | University of Southampton](#)); a collective of critical data researchers challenging the misuse of statistics in global, social and environmental issues. Our goal is to create thought-provoking counter-narratives and drive real-world change, to expose statistical misrepresentations and distortions of global social and environmental issues and present creative statistical counter-stories.

The main contributors to this response are Frankie Norton MSc and Jessica Boxall MSc ANutr. Frankie Norton is a political analyst in Just Statistics with a strong intellectual interest and knowledge of international relations, specifically the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Jessica Boxall ANutr is a global health research fellow at University of Southampton, with expertise in public health and nutrition, especially within the context of under-served and vulnerable populations. Her role in Just Statistics is as a data analyst and health expert.

Just Statistics are working on a multitude of projects within the space of the Israeli military operation in Palestine. They have a [pre-print](#) exploring the humanitarian and military aid flow, to Palestine and Israel respectively, by countries within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Other outputs are based on the expansion of Israel's bombardment into Lebanon, including the targeting of UN peacekeepers, and the donation parity between Israel and Gaza from OECD countries and UNRWA. Current research is ongoing on the different forms of military aid that Israel is receiving from countries across the globe, and how they are facilitating this military operation on Palestinian civilians.

QUESTIONS:

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

The UK should follow the recent move from Ireland, Spain and Norway, in recognising the State of Palestine. In providing this recognition, Palestinians can be properly represented at peace talks and international summits. By continuing to follow Israel's lead in only allowing a weakened Palestinian entity – such as their observer status in the UN and being unable to receive aid from the UN Refugee Agency – we perpetuate Israeli domination over the Palestinians, which can only lead to continued occupation and violence. This also leads to a weakening of their voices at the international table, and lesser worldwide respect from other member states.

Sanctions on Israeli leadership should be considered in order to give weight to the rulings of the ICC. Aligned with this, the UK should abide by the Genocide Convention, and respect and enforce rulings of ICC. There should be a rhetorical commitment to both labelling Israel's actions as genocide, and committing to prevent genocide. We have witnessed these lessons before in history, in the complete dehumanisation and eradication of a civilian population. It was these situations that called for the creation of the Genocide Convention originally, and this should be remembered in unfortunately applicable situations.

Additionally, the UK government should cease all trade of military and dual-use technologies to Israel. Only by suspending all arms exports licences, and preventing the

export of dual-use technology, including surveillance equipment, can we be sure that UK technology is not used for war crimes.

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

The UK's approach has favoured maintaining relations with Israel and prioritising Israel's military superiority over its neighbours, at the expense of the Palestinian people. There is overwhelming evidence of war crimes committed by Israel against the people of Gaza, and while many across the world, including international organisations, have labelled Israel's actions as genocide (UN, 2024, Amnesty International, 2024, Human Rights Watch, 2024), the UK has continually failed to criticise these actions. For too long, the UK government continued to allow arms sales to Israel. The suspension of 30 arms export licences in Sept 2024 is a welcome step, but does not go far enough. In continuing to allow the sale of arms, while at the same time providing humanitarian aid to Gaza, the UK has contributed to emboldening Israel to commit genocide, and perpetuating a situation that it is claiming to be trying to solve. In our pre-print publication, we showed how many of the states which claim to be providing sufficient humanitarian aid to Gaza, are supplying the weapons which are being used on the civilian population (Pathak et al, 2024).

By continuing to sell arms to Israel and by refusing to properly condemn Israel's actions, the UK has weakened any claims to be acting morally in its international relations. The UK has also weakened the credibility of international law. For example, many UK leaders have refused to call Israel's actions genocide.

In addition, by assisting Israel in its surveillance of Gaza (BBC, 2023), the UK has exposed itself to the possibility that intelligence gathered by RAF has been used to contribute to Israel's indiscriminate killing of civilians.

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?

To assure the resilience of efforts to bring about a lasting peace, the UK should look for common ground with European countries such as Ireland in recognising State of Palestine, and beyond. They should follow these examples in renouncing diplomatic cover for Israel, and cease referring to them as an ally.

This also entails moving beyond following the US lead. The re-election of Donald Trump will only reaffirm US commitment to Israel, and the UK needs to make clear that it will not go along with US on this, despite its influence. The UK should seek common ground with the majority of the UN member states that recognise Palestine and support Palestinian statehood.

The UK government should strengthen aid links and put in place processes and structures, protect aid passages to Gaza and West Bank and surrounding countries. It would also increase the chances of a lasting peace by promoting cultural contact with Palestinian groups, to foster greater understanding in the UK regarding the oppression of Palestinians.

References:

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DOI: 10.5258/SOTON/PP0095