# British Jewish deputies challenge Israel’s Gaza campaign amid community divisions



In the midst of Israel's ongoing military campaign in Gaza, a small yet significant faction within the British Jewish community is challenging the narrative surrounding the conflict. The recent letter, signed by 36 members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and published in the Financial Times, has ignited a profound debate not only within Jewish circles but also across the wider British public. This letter contends that Israel's actions in Gaza, especially the decision to reassert military operations and enforce a blockade, have led to an escalation in violence that contradicts core Jewish values.

The signatories, who represent a diverse spectrum of Jewish identities and beliefs—including many affiliated with the Reform and Liberal streams of Judaism—expressed their distress over what they termed an "unbearable" humanitarian crisis emerging from the conflict. They called for an immediate cessation of the war, urging prioritisation of negotiations aimed at securing the release of hostages held by Hamas. This conscience-driven stance highlights a fundamental divide within the community regarding support for Israel as a state versus its current government's policies.

Reactions from the Board of Deputies, including disciplinary measures taken against some signatories, underscore the contentious nature of this discourse. Phil Rosenberg, the Board's president, responded to the letter by indicating that the signatories are only representing a small fraction of the Board’s membership. However, polling conducted last September suggested that a significant majority—approximately 74%—of British Jews believe that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's actions are more aligned with his political interests than those of Israel itself. This scrutiny raises critical questions about the moral obligations of Jewish leaders in the face of humanitarian crises.

Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that despite the backlash, many British Jews are publicly critical of Israel's military actions. Organisations such as Na'amod and Yachad, which focus on promoting justice and security for Palestinians, reflect a growing sentiment that challenges the traditional narrative of unwavering support for Israeli government policies. This evolution in the conversation is not merely academic; it resonates deeply with personal and familial dynamics as British Jews confront the fallout from the conflict. Reports indicate that many Jewish families are experiencing painful discussions about their positions on Israel and its actions, signifying a wider communal rift.

In Israel, the public's response mirrors this division. Daily protests, fueled by a significant portion of the population—68% according to recent polls—call for an end to hostilities and a more humane approach to the conflict. Opposition leaders, like former IDF deputy chief Yair Golan, have also voiced substantial criticism of the government's tactics, characterising its actions as reminiscent of apartheid-era South Africa, a sentiment that reflects a longing for a more measured and ethical approach to governance.

The Board of Deputies' approach to addressing dissent within its ranks raises important questions about its role as the voice of British Jews. While some members see criticism of Israel's government as a betrayal, the dissonance between community sentiments and institutional responses is becoming increasingly evident. The letter from the 36 deputies may well mark a tipping point, urging leaders within the Board to grapple with the complexities and ethical dilemmas of their support for Israel amidst a campaign that some perceive as excessively aggressive.

As debates continue and disciplinary actions unfold, the ramifications of this internal criticism of Israeli policy could foster a reassessment of what it means to support and defend Israel as a state. Whatever the outcome, it is clear that the dynamics within the British Jewish community are shifting—a reflection of a broader moral reckoning that transcends borders and resonates within global Jewish consciousness.

In this context, the dialogue initiated by the 36 deputies might not only reshape conversations within Britain but could also influence how Jewish identity and ethical responsibility are navigated in a divided world.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/benjamin-netanyahu-keir-starmer-gaza-war-hamas-israel-b2755925.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/6a506d98-40a0-48e7-8e98-2882beb30914), [[4]](https://www.trevorgrundy.news/leaders-of-britains-jewish-community-condemn-benjamin-netanyahus-ethically-offensive-gaza-campaign-gaza-offensive/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/benjamin-netanyahu-keir-starmer-gaza-war-hamas-israel-b2755925.html), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/28/a-cruel-and-painful-year-how-7-october-tore-apart-uk-jewish-families-and-friends), [[5]](https://www.timesofisrael.com/over-10-of-members-of-uk-jewish-umbrella-group-sign-letter-urging-end-to-gaza-war/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/board-investigation-deputies-ft-letter-e56mqn6g), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/23/dozens-of-members-of-uk-jewish-body-facing-disciplinary-action-over-criticism-of-israel)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/board-investigation-deputies-ft-letter-e56mqn6g), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/28/a-cruel-and-painful-year-how-7-october-tore-apart-uk-jewish-families-and-friends)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/benjamin-netanyahu-keir-starmer-gaza-war-hamas-israel-b2755925.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/6a506d98-40a0-48e7-8e98-2882beb30914)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/benjamin-netanyahu-keir-starmer-gaza-war-hamas-israel-b2755925.html), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/28/a-cruel-and-painful-year-how-7-october-tore-apart-uk-jewish-families-and-friends)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/benjamin-netanyahu-keir-starmer-gaza-war-hamas-israel-b2755925.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/6a506d98-40a0-48e7-8e98-2882beb30914> - A letter signed by 36 members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, published in the Financial Times, expresses deep concern over Israel's actions in Gaza. The signatories highlight the success of diplomatic negotiations in securing the release of hostages and criticize the Israeli government's decision to resume military operations, leading to increased loss of life and humanitarian blockades. They call for an end to the war, prioritization of hostage recovery, and a commitment to peace and reconciliation, emphasizing that Jewish values compel them to speak out against injustice and violence.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/28/a-cruel-and-painful-year-how-7-october-tore-apart-uk-jewish-families-and-friends> - An article discussing the impact of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on UK Jewish families and communities. The Institute for Jewish Policy Research conducted a survey revealing that about 75% of British Jews believe Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is prioritizing his own interests over those of Israel. The piece also highlights internal debates within families and communities regarding support for Israel's government and the humanitarian situation in Gaza, underscoring the complex and painful discussions surrounding the conflict.
4. <https://www.trevorgrundy.news/leaders-of-britains-jewish-community-condemn-benjamin-netanyahus-ethically-offensive-gaza-campaign-gaza-offensive/> - A report detailing the publication of a letter signed by 36 members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, condemning Israel's actions in Gaza. The letter criticizes the Israeli government's decision to resume military operations, leading to increased loss of life and humanitarian blockades. It also expresses concern over the erosion of democratic norms within Israel. The signatories call for an end to the war, prioritization of hostage recovery, and a commitment to peace and reconciliation, emphasizing that Jewish values compel them to speak out against injustice and violence.
5. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/over-10-of-members-of-uk-jewish-umbrella-group-sign-letter-urging-end-to-gaza-war/> - An article reporting on a letter signed by over 10% of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, urging an end to the Gaza war. The letter criticizes the Israeli government's decision to resume military operations, leading to increased loss of life and humanitarian blockades. It also expresses concern over the erosion of democratic norms within Israel. The signatories call for an end to the war, prioritization of hostage recovery, and a commitment to peace and reconciliation, emphasizing that Jewish values compel them to speak out against injustice and violence.
6. <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/board-investigation-deputies-ft-letter-e56mqn6g> - An article reporting that the Board of Deputies of British Jews has launched a complaints procedure against the 36 deputies who signed a letter published in the Financial Times, condemning Israel's actions in Gaza. The article details the disciplinary actions taken, including the suspension of Harriet Goldenberg, the vice-chair of the Board’s International Division, pending the outcome of the investigation. The Board's executive committee convened to discuss the ramifications and consequences of the letter, which has sparked a communal row.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/23/dozens-of-members-of-uk-jewish-body-facing-disciplinary-action-over-criticism-of-israel> - An article reporting that dozens of members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews are facing disciplinary action for signing a letter published in the Financial Times, criticizing Israel's actions in Gaza. The Board has launched a complaints procedure against the signatories, with some senior members suspended. The article details the Board's response to the letter, which has sparked a communal row, and includes statements from Board officials and signatories expressing their concerns over Israel's actions and the Board's stance.