# UK escalates pressure on Israel amid Gaza crisis with sanctions and diplomatic rebuke



Israel’s ambassador to the UK has been confronted with mounting pressure from the British government amid the ongoing military operations in Gaza, a situation that has left the UK-Israel relationship increasingly strained. As Israeli tanks were spotted advancing near the Gaza border, Foreign Secretary David Lammy condemned the military escalation, labelling the actions “monstrous” and reaffirming the UK’s commitment to not “stand by” during this period of violence.

In a clearly defined response to Israel's actions, which have resulted in profound humanitarian crises and significant civilian casualties — reports suggest over 53,000 Palestinians have been killed since the resurgence of hostilities following the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023 — the UK has suspended trade negotiations with Israel and imposed sanctions targeting West Bank settlers. Lammy, speaking in the Commons, expressed that the UK’s support of Israel’s right to self-defence had become eclipsed by the moral implications of the ongoing military response. “Whatever Israeli ministers claim, this is not the way to bring the hostages safely home,” he stated emphatically.

The government’s actions include summoning Tzipi Hotovely, Israel’s ambassador, to articulate the UK’s opposition not only to the expansion of military operations in Gaza but also to the rising violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers in the West Bank. Middle East Minister Hamish Falconer highlighted to Hotovely that the UK’s patience was wearing thin and that the government had a responsibility to intervene where necessary.

In addition to this diplomatic pressure, discussions among UK MPs have led to calls for stronger action, including potential sanctions against prominent figures in Netanyahu’s government such as finance minister Bezalel Smotrich and national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. The urgency of the situation was echoed by international voices, where even allies like the EU are contemplating reviewing trade agreements with Israel. Top EU diplomat Kaja Kallas noted that the bloc would assess its position, aligning with sentiments expressed by the 17 of the 27 member states that support such a move.

The Israeli government's response to these sanctions has been dismissive, with spokesman Oren Marmorstein describing them as “unjustified and regrettable.” He argued that the UK's domestic political dynamics should not dictate economic relations, asserting that Israel remains steadfast in its right to defend itself against perceived external threats.

The grim humanitarian situation in Gaza remains central to international discussion, with UN officials warning of severe shortages of food, medicine, and vital supplies. The humanitarian agencies stress that conditions are approaching a potential disaster, with the need for at least 500 aid trucks per day to alleviate the suffering of the approximately two million inhabitants of Gaza. Despite ongoing calls for an increase in aid access, deliveries remain critically low, exacerbated by the complexities of logistical arrangements imposed by Israeli authorities.

In light of these developments, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer commented on the “intolerable” situation, which he contends provides justification for the UK’s actions. Starmer has played an active role in coordinating with allies to intensify pressure on Israel for a ceasefire and increased humanitarian support.

The ongoing conflict and resultant international response highlight the complexities of Middle Eastern geopolitics, where historical grievances and territorial disputes continue to fuel hostilities. The UK’s current stance signals a potentially significant shift in its foreign policy concerning Israel and the broader Middle Eastern region, reflecting an increasing willingness to confront actions deemed as violations of human rights amid a backdrop of long-standing support for Israel's security.

As global scrutiny intensifies, the path ahead remains fraught with challenges, balancing national security interests while addressing humanitarian needs and international law. The impact of these measures will likely reverberate beyond the immediate crisis, influencing foreign relations and humanitarian efforts in a region where efforts for peace remain tenuous at best.

**Reference Map**1: Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 5
2: Paragraphs 2, 4, 6
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4: Paragraphs 4, 5
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6: Paragraph 3
7: Paragraph 3

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/israeli-ambassador-told-uk-will-not-stand-by-as-offensive-on-gaza-escalates/a1390310376.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/0dc7feeb-0136-4229-8154-442daeb973fe> - The UK and the EU have intensified pressure on Israel over its renewed military offensive in Gaza. UK Foreign Minister David Lammy announced a freeze on trade talks with Israel, condemning the situation as "abominable," while EU top diplomat Kaja Kallas said the bloc would review its trade agreement following backing from 17 of its 27 member states. Israeli opposition leader Yair Golan criticized the government's actions, warning that Israel risks becoming a "pariah state". International criticism has mounted over Israel's blockade and airstrikes, which Palestinian officials say have killed over 53,500 people, with a UN panel noting severe starvation conditions affecting hundreds of thousands. Tom Fletcher from the UN warned of potential genocide with 14,000 babies at risk. The UK, France, and Canada threatened further actions, and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer demanded significantly increased aid to Gaza. Netanyahu acknowledged allowing minimal aid in response to international pressure. Additional sanctions were imposed by the UK on Israeli settlers and organizations linked to West Bank violence, while EU plans for further sanctions were blocked by Hungary. The situation has drawn condemnation from global leaders, including Qatar and France, with Paris expressing intent to recognize a Palestinian state.
3. <https://www.apnews.com/article/acabcdb4da0f1368f7e8a471cf494c0e> - On May 20, 2025, the UK suspended free trade talks with Israel and imposed sanctions on West Bank settlers in response to Israel’s continued military offensive in Gaza and its blockade on humanitarian aid. UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy criticized Israel’s actions as "indefensible," echoing sentiments from other international leaders, including UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, who all demanded a ceasefire and increased aid access. The European Union also announced it was reviewing its trade agreement with Israel. Sanctions target individuals, illegal settler outposts, and organizations supporting violence against Palestinians. These measures follow increased settler violence and a worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where over 53,000 Palestinians have been killed since Israel's campaign began in response to the October 2023 Hamas attack. Despite growing international pressure, Israel has dismissed many criticisms, calling international demands a reward for Hamas. Israel has allowed limited aid into Gaza, which humanitarian organizations deem insufficient. Tensions between Israel and its allies continue to rise amidst calls for recognition of a Palestinian state and a possible two-state solution.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-strikes-kill-dozens-gaza-criticism-israel-grows-2025-05-20/> - At least 55 Palestinians were killed in Israeli airstrikes on Gaza on May 20, 2025, amid growing international criticism of Israel’s ongoing military operations and blockade. Despite easing a restriction on aid entry, the United Nations reports that major humanitarian deliveries remain stalled. The conflict, nearing its 20th month, has caused widespread devastation in Gaza, displacing nearly all of its 2.3 million residents and resulting in over 53,000 deaths, according to Gaza health authorities. Strikes hit civilian homes and a school, killing 18 people, including children. Britain has suspended trade talks with Israel and imposed sanctions over its actions in the occupied territories. The EU is considering similar measures but faces internal opposition. Ceasefire negotiations in Qatar have broken down, with Israel recalling its negotiators and pledging further military escalation, while Hamas accuses Israel of bad faith. The humanitarian crisis continues to grow, with the U.N. warning that food supplies are critically low and that at least 500 aid trucks daily are needed. The war began in October 2023 after a Hamas-led attack that killed around 1,200 Israelis and took over 250 hostages.
5. <https://www.apnews.com/article/402954f7424825ef73ad57f17a701fac> - On May 20, 2025, Israeli airstrikes in Gaza killed at least 85 Palestinians as Israel continued its military offensive aimed at retrieving hostages and dismantling Hamas. Despite international criticism and humanitarian concerns, aid deliveries into Gaza remain minimal and largely undelivered due to Israeli-imposed logistical barriers. The region has experienced severe shortages of food, medicine, and fuel during a nearly three-month blockade, with the UN warning of a potential famine for Gaza's 2 million residents. While Israel allowed limited aid to enter following pressure from allies, the UN reports that distribution is hindered by complex and dangerous procedures. Criticism escalated as the UK suspended trade talks and imposed sanctions against Israeli settler movements. Domestically, opposition politician Yair Golan condemned Israel's actions against civilians, sparking controversy. The latest airstrikes targeted areas like Deir al-Balah, Khan Younis, and refugee camps, killing dozens of civilians, including women and children. Meanwhile, ceasefire negotiations in Doha stalled, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recalling his negotiating team. Since the conflict began on October 7, 2023, over 53,000 Palestinians have been killed and 58 hostages remain in Hamas custody.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-suspends-arms-export-licences-to-israel-for-use-in-gaza-over-international-humanitarian-law-concerns> - The UK government has suspended around 30 arms export licences to Israel for use in military operations in Gaza, following a review of Israel’s compliance with international humanitarian law. The suspension applies to items used in the current conflict in Gaza, including components for military aircraft, helicopters, and drones. The UK continues to support Israel’s right to self-defence in accordance with international law, and the decision will be kept under review. The suspension does not change the UK’s steadfast support for Israel’s security, and the decision will be kept under review.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/sep/02/uk-suspends-30-arms-export-licences-to-israel-after-review> - The UK Foreign Office announced the suspension of 30 out of 350 arms export licences to Israel, following a two-month internal review that raised concerns about Israel's conduct in the conflict in Gaza. The suspension specifically relates to concerns around the treatment of Palestinian detainees and the supply of aid to Gaza. The decision does not amount to a full arms embargo, and the UK continues to support Israel's right to self-defence in accordance with international law. The suspension is likely to cause tensions with the US government, as British exports amount to less than one percent of the total arms Israel receives.