# Foreign Secretary’s harsh stance on Israel signals unsettling shift in UK foreign policy



In recent days, the UK’s response to the escalating humanitarian crisis in Gaza is causing alarm, particularly following Foreign Secretary David Lammy's vehement condemnation of Israel's military actions. His rhetoric signals a troubling departure in British foreign policy, one that prioritizes a splash of dramatic denunciation over a balanced approach that recognizes the complexities of the conflict. Labeling the ongoing bombings as "intolerable" and describing Israel's actions as "repellent and monstrous," Lammy's remarks reflect a reckless abandonment of diplomatic pragmatism, further straining UK-Israel relations.

The humanitarian disaster in Gaza has deepened at a staggering rate, with claims that over 53,500 Palestinians have died since the onset of Israel's offensive, framed as retaliation for the October Hamas attack. This extended military operation and suffocating aid blockade not only threaten lives but also reflect an irresponsible approach to foreign policy, prioritizing populist sentiment over strategic alliances. Lammy's urgent plea to Prime Minister Netanyahu to "End this blockade and let aid in" reveals a lack of understanding of the necessity for a balanced response that considers both humanitarian concerns and the complexities of security.

The decision to suspend trade negotiations fits into a pattern of capitulation to public opinion, aligning too closely with a broader, disjointed European response that risks undermining UK interests in the region. This coordinated stance suggests a knee-jerk reaction rather than a thoughtful strategy, overshadowing the need for Britain to maintain robust ties with key allies. The announced sanctions against senior Israeli figures, including Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, signal an escalating diplomatic crisis that could have long-term repercussions for UK foreign relations.

In addition, the reinstatement of £21 million in funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) raises questions about accountability. Despite previous suspensions due to serious allegations concerning UNRWA’s staff, Lammy insists that urgent humanitarian needs outweigh concerns about misuse of funds. This approach not only skirts accountability but also reinforces the sense of moral superiority among those who favor a one-sided view of the conflict, forgetting the complexities and nuances that must be acknowledged in any true resolution.

As tensions intensify, calls from opposition parties for transparency on alleged violations of international humanitarian law by Israel wind up echoing a politically charged atmosphere rather than a genuine commitment to justice. While the government claims adherence to strict arms export regulations, the pressure to conform to a populist narrative may lead to long-term damage in longstanding alliances, sidelining security considerations amidst a growing clamor to halt arms sales.

This radical shift in policy underscores a significant departure from Conservative norms, indicating an unsettling alignment with an overly simplistic narrative that fails to address the deeper issues at play. The current administration's priority on humanitarian rhetoric over strategic support for allies indicates an inclination towards appeasing fleeting public sentiments rather than engaging in the hard truths that dictate effective foreign engagement.

As the situation develops, the UK’s position in the face of international outcry raises serious questions about its commitment to a comprehensive peace strategy. It becomes increasingly clear that any lasting resolution must acknowledge the rights and needs of all parties involved, rather than adhere to a dangerously one-dimensional approach that may ultimately destabilize the region further.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy755y2nde3o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://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.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/0dc7feeb-0136-4229-8154-442daeb973fe> - The UK and EU have escalated pressure on Israel regarding its intensified military offensive in Gaza, citing humanitarian concerns and possible breaches of international conduct. UK Foreign Minister David Lammy announced the suspension of trade deal talks, while EU foreign affairs chief Kaja Kallas declared a review of the EU-Israel trade agreement, supported by 17 member states. This move follows growing domestic and international criticism, including from Israeli opposition leader Yair Golan, who warned that Israel risks becoming a pariah state. Accusations have surged against Prime Minister Netanyahu’s government for its military actions, resulting in over 53,500 Palestinian deaths, according to Palestinian officials, and severe humanitarian crises, including famine risks for around 500,000 Palestinians and 14,000 babies. Despite Israeli claims that aid restrictions aim to prevent supplies from reaching Hamas, international pressure forced limited aid entry. The UK, France, and Canada threatened further actions unless humanitarian access improves. Netanyahu’s ultranationalist cohort, including Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, faced fierce rebukes for inflammatory rhetoric. Additional sanctions were imposed on West Bank settlers by the UK, while the EU failed to pass similar measures due to a Hungarian veto. The international backlash highlights growing discontent with Israel’s conduct and calls for recognition of Palestinian statehood, including from France.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/32f5cccf-3567-410c-b00f-b8dfaca25904> - The UK will restore funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) following its earlier suspension due to allegations of staff involvement in a Hamas attack on Israel. Foreign Secretary David Lammy announced the decision, emphasizing the moral necessity of humanitarian aid amid the Israel-Hamas conflict. The restoration will involve £21 million in new funding. Despite being "appalled" by the allegations, Lammy highlighted that an independent review confirmed UNRWA's commitment to management reforms and neutrality standards. UNRWA plays a crucial role in delivering aid to Gaza's population, with the UK’s support deemed vital for current and future humanitarian efforts. Lammy also discussed the importance of increasing the aid flow into Gaza, recognizing the immense need for humanitarian aid in the region.
5. <https://apnews.com/article/ba6ff8b0d409d80e56dca98a9712efd2> - Britain's main opposition parties are pressing the Conservative government to release legal advice regarding whether Israel has violated international humanitarian law in the ongoing war in Gaza. The pressure follows an Israeli airstrike that killed seven aid workers from World Central Kitchen, including three Britons. Labour's foreign affairs spokesman, David Lammy, emphasized the need for transparency and called for an arms sale suspension if there is a risk of violations. London Mayor Sadiq Khan and other opposition parties, including the Liberal Democrats and Scottish National Party, echoed these demands. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak did not commit to publishing the legal advice but stated that the U.K. follows stringent rules on arms exports and reiterated the importance of Israel adhering to international law while defending itself.
6. <https://time.com/7013366/as-britain-pivots-on-gaza-calls-for-an-arms-embargo-grows/> - Following the Labour Party's victory in July's elections, Britain’s new government is under increasing pressure to alter its stance on the Israel-Gaza conflict. Foreign Secretary David Lammy reinstated funding to UNRWA and dropped plans to challenge the ICC's jurisdiction over Israeli leaders accused of war crimes. However, calls from pro-Palestinian activists and human rights groups to suspend arms sales to Israel have intensified, exacerbated by a recent diplomat resignation in protest of the UK's inaction. Public sentiment largely supports halting arms sales, with 58% in favor, reflecting widespread demands for an immediate ceasefire. The government is conducting a comprehensive review to assess possible Israeli war crimes, with outcomes delayed due to complexities distinguishing offensive and defensive weapon use. Similar historical precedents of arms embargoes on Israel during conflicts raise the expectation for decisive action that could influence global allies like the U.S. to pressure Israel towards compliance with international law.
7. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/09/03/the-uk-partially-suspends-its-arms-sales-to-israel_6724560_4.html> - The new Labour government in the UK, under Prime Minister Keir Starmer, has decided to partially suspend arms sales to Israel. Foreign Secretary David Lammy announced the suspension of 30 out of 350 arms export licenses to Israel, effective immediately, due to concerns that these weapons might be used in Gaza, potentially violating international humanitarian law. This decision represents a significant diplomatic shift from previous Conservative policies and comes amid ongoing tensions in Gaza. The suspension, though largely symbolic, signifies a shift in the UK's stance on foreign policy concerning Israel and its use of military force. While Israel primarily imports arms from the US and Germany, the UK's decision marks a notable departure from its traditionally close alignment with American foreign policy. Lammy emphasized that the suspension is a legal precaution and not meant to undermine Israel’s right to self-defense. The move has generated varying reactions within the Labour Party and has differences from positions previously held by Starmer before becoming prime minister.