

**Research Briefing**

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By Library specialists

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# 2023/24 Israel-Hamas conflict: UK and international response

## Summary

- 1 Events in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 7 October
- 2 UK Government statements and position
- 3 UK Government actions
- 4 UN response and actions
- 5 Response of G7, United States and European Union
- 6 Response in the wider Middle East

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Events in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 7 October</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1	Initial Hamas attacks against Israel	9
1.2	Israeli air strikes and actions in Gaza	10
1.3	Humanitarian situation and access	11
1.4	Situation in the West Bank	13
1.5	Pauses in fighting	13
1.6	Governing post-conflict Gaza	14
<b>2</b>	<b>UK Government statements and position</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1	Three UK priorities	17
2.2	Position on a ceasefire	18
2.3	Two-state solution and post-conflict Gaza	19
2.4	Israeli settler violence	22
2.5	International humanitarian law	22
2.6	UK arms sales to Israel	25
2.7	Reports of sexual violence by Hamas	25
2.8	Forced displacement of Palestinians	26
2.9	British nationals in Gaza	27
2.10	Funding to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim incidents	27
2.11	Parliamentary votes in the UK	28
<b>3</b>	<b>UK Government actions</b>	<b>30</b>
3.1	UK diplomatic activity	30
3.2	Deployment of UK military forces	31
3.3	UK humanitarian aid	32

<b>3.4</b>	<b>UK support for Lebanon</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>New UK sanctions and visa restrictions</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>UN response and actions</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Statements by the UN Secretary General</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>UN Security Council and General Assembly</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>How has the UK voted at the UN?</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b>International Court of Justice (ICJ), 2023/24</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Response of G7, United States and European Union</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>G7 leaders and foreign ministers</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>United States</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>European Union</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Response in the wider Middle East</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Violence in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Arab League and Organization for Islamic Cooperation</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Middle Eastern states</b>	<b>53</b>

## Summary

On 7 October 2023, the Palestinian group Hamas, officially designated a terrorist group by many countries including Israel, the United States, the European Union, and the United Kingdom, commenced an armed assault against Israel. It launched several thousand rockets into Israel and conducted attacks in border areas, [killing around 1,200 civilians](#), and [taking 253 hostages](#), as part of what it called “Operation Al-Aqsa Flood”.

This briefing provides information on the UK and international response to the conflict, including activity at the UN and statements by the UK Government.

## Ongoing hostilities and casualties

In response to the assault, [Israel conducted air strikes against Hamas in Gaza](#) and on 28 October launched a ground attack to [“destroy Hamas’ governing and military capabilities and to bring the hostages home”](#). Hamas continues to [fire rockets into Israel](#). [Ongoing hostilities](#) are also taking place between Israel and Iran-aligned Hezbollah in Lebanon and northern Israel.

Other Iran-aligned groups in Syria and Iraq have conducted attacks against US forces, [killing three troops](#) in Jordan in January, [drawing a US response](#). From Yemen, [the Houthis have launched attacks](#) on shipping in the Red Sea.

Citing Israeli authorities and the Hamas-controlled Ministry of Health, the [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) says that since 7 October, more than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals have been reported killed and 5,431 injured. At least 29,092 Palestinians have been reported killed and about 69,028 injured across Gaza and Israel ([as of 19 February 2024](#)).

[The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(UNOCHA\)](#) estimates that [1.7 million of Gaza’s 2.2 million population are now displaced](#).

## Pauses in fighting and humanitarian access

On 9 November, the United States said [Israel would begin four to five hour pauses in its military operations in Gaza](#). The Israeli Defence Forces has said these are [“tactical, local pauses” for the delivery of aid and not a ceasefire](#).

From 24 November to 1 December, a pause took place to enable the release of hostages. Before the pause began, Israel said it would last no longer than ten days and [fighting would then resume](#). The pause enabled the [release of 110 hostages](#) from Gaza and 240 Palestinian prisoners from Israel.

There has been only limited humanitarian access to Gaza since 7 October 2023. On 18 October, [Israel agreed to the reopening of the Rafah crossing](#) between Egypt and Gaza for humanitarian aid. From November, up to [500 foreign nationals and injured Palestinians](#) have been able to leave daily.

On 17 December, the Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and Gaza [also opened for aid](#). Israel has also agreed to a [maritime aid corridor](#) between Cyprus and Gaza, in which the UK is expected to participate.

## UN Secretary General and UN Security Council

On 24 October, the UN Secretary General, António Guterres called for an [“immediate humanitarian ceasefire”](#). He [reiterated this call](#) in January. He has also called for [unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza](#). The UN Security Council has passed two binding resolutions since 7 October:

- 15 November: [The resolution](#) called for the immediate release of all hostages and for “urgent and extended humanitarian corridors” in Gaza. Russia, the UK, and the US abstained (the US and UK said [the resolution needed to condemn Hamas](#), Russia [called for a ceasefire](#)).
- 22 December: The Council passed a [second resolution](#) demanding an increase in aid (Russia and the US abstained).

Israel’s UN representative [criticised both resolutions](#) for not condemning Hamas and said [Israel “will continue to act until Hamas is destroyed and the hostages are returned”](#). The Palestinian Authority representative said it wanted to see an [“immediate ceasefire, humanitarian assistance at scale, and no forced displacement \[from Gaza\]”](#).

## International Court of Justice case

In January 2024, the [International Court of Justice \(ICJ\)](#) issued preliminary (emergency) measures on a case brought against Israel by South Africa alleging Israel was breaching its [obligations under the Genocide Convention](#) (PDF). The case will likely last several years.

The ICJ did not order a ceasefire, as requested by South Africa, but set out certain steps for Israel to take, including increasing humanitarian aid to Gaza and taking “all measures” to prevent the “commission of genocidal acts”. [Israel argues the case is a “distort\[ion\]” of the convention](#). Both South Africa and the Palestinian Authority have said Israeli military operations must end.

## United States, EU and G7 response

- The G7 (the US, Japan, Canada, UK, Germany, France, Italy, and the EU) supports “[humanitarian pauses and corridors](#)” to allow for aid delivery. It has called for the unconditional release of hostages and [condemned the “rise in extremist settler violence against Palestinians”](#) in the West Bank. The [US](#) and [EU](#) have announced additional humanitarian aid to Gaza.
- The [United States](#) and the [EU](#) have announced sanctions against Hamas and other Iran-aligned groups. The [US](#) and [France](#) have introduced visa restrictions against some Israeli settlers involved in West Bank violence.
- The [US](#) and [some EU states](#) are deploying additional military assets to support de-escalation and [protect maritime security in the Red Sea](#).

## UK Government response

### UK Government advice for British nationals

- Any [British nationals in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories](#) and [Lebanon](#) should register their presence with the UK Government. It advises that [all British nationals should leave Lebanon](#).
- Palestinians in Gaza who are not a dependent of a British national but wish to apply for a UK visa are [not currently eligible for assistance](#).
- The UK says the Rafah crossing is “open for controlled and time-limited periods”. [The Egyptian authorities will contact the UK embassy](#) when British nationals can cross. The UK embassy will then notify individuals.

### UK military, diplomatic and humanitarian actions

- [The UK has deployed military assets](#) to promote de-escalation and conduct surveillance activities. It has [not provided “lethal or military equipment other than medical supplies to Israel”](#) since 7 October.
- The UK is participating in Operation Prosperity Guardian to protect Red Sea shipping from Houthi attacks and is conducting air strikes with the United States. The Library research briefing, [UK and international response to Houthis in the Red Sea](#), provides more information.
- UK Government ministers have met with leaders and others in the region to discuss de-escalation and humanitarian pauses. The Foreign Secretary is seeking to [establish a “contact group”](#) to advance talks on a two-state solution. He has also said Iran must be [“held accountable” for the actions of proxy groups](#) in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.

- In 2023/24, the UK plans £87 million in aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. None is directed via Hamas. The Commons Library research briefing, [UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip](#), has more information.

## UK Government statements on the conflict

- Hamas: Prime Minister [Rishi Sunak condemned the 7 October assault by Hamas](#) as a “pogrom” and said Hamas must release all hostages unconditionally. He said [Hamas can no longer be allowed to rule Gaza](#).
- International law: The Government says it [expects all parties to the conflict to comply](#) and minimise civilian casualties. It [raises the protection of civilians](#) “on every occasion” when meeting Israeli officials.
- Displacement of Palestinians: The UK has said there [should be no “forced displacement”](#) from Gaza and that [“Gaza is Occupied Palestinian Territory and will be part of a future Palestinian state”](#).
- Arms export licences: The Government says these are [kept under review](#). They are assessed against the [UK’s arms exports criteria](#), which include terminating a licence if there is a “clear risk” it might be used to “commit or facilitate” a serious violation of international humanitarian law.
- Two-state solution: The [Government supports](#) “a Palestinian state [...] alongside a safe and secure Israel”. [It will recognise a Palestinian state](#) when judged to “best serve the objective of peace”. [Post-conflict priorities](#) include establishing a “credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution” and [reforms to the Palestinian Authority](#).
- Israeli settler violence: [The UK has condemned the violence](#) in the West Bank. In February, it announced [visa restrictions](#) against “extremist Israeli settlers”. Israel’s Prime Minister has also [condemned the violence](#).
- ICJ: In response to the court’s preliminary order issued in January, the UK Government said it considered bringing of the case as [“unhelpful”](#). It said some of the preliminary orders, such as Hamas releasing hostages and for more aid to enter Gaza, were [things the UK had been calling for](#).

## Debate in the UK on a “sustainable ceasefire”

- The Government [supports a “sustainable ceasefire”](#) as a pathway to a “sustainable peace”. [Such a ceasefire includes](#) the release of hostages, aid delivery, and for Hamas to no longer pose a threat to Israel. It argues [a ceasefire otherwise is “implausible”](#) as it requires both sides to agree.
- The Government supports more [temporary “humanitarian pauses”](#) for the delivery of aid and the release of hostages.
- In February, the Labour Party [called for an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire”](#), having previously [called for a “sustainable ceasefire”](#) and humanitarian pauses. The SNP has [called for an immediate ceasefire](#). The Liberal Democrats support for [an “immediate bilateral ceasefire”](#).



# 1 Events in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 7 October

This is a summary of events from 7 October 2023 to 20 February 2024. It is not intended to provide detailed information on fast-moving events. Further reading and resources on the conflict is provided at the end of this section.

During active conflicts and because of the challenges journalists, researchers and civil society organisations have with accessing a conflict zone, reports on specific stories and accurate statistics can be difficult to verify.

The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) publishes [daily updates on casualties](#). BBC Verify's, [How the dead are counted in Gaza](#), 16 November 2023, explains how they are reported.

## 1.1 Initial Hamas attacks against Israel

On 7 October 2023, the Palestinian group Hamas, officially designated a terrorist organisation by the governments of Israel, the United States and United Kingdom, commenced an armed assault against Israel.<sup>1</sup>

The group launched several thousand rockets into Israel, conducted attacks in border areas, [killing around 1,200 civilians](#), and took a reported 253 hostages, as part of what it called "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood".<sup>2</sup>

Hamas spokesperson Mohammed Deif, the commander-in-chief of the [Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades](#) (Hamas' military wing), said the attack against Israel was "in response to the continued Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people and violations at the [Al-Aqsa Mosque](#)".<sup>3</sup>

In response to the assault, on 8 October Israel's security cabinet declared war on Hamas and said it would launch "significant military activities" against it.<sup>4</sup>

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has condemned violence "on both sides".<sup>5</sup> The [Palestinian Authority](#) has had limited authority over Gaza

<sup>1</sup> UK: Home Office, [Islamist terrorist group Hamas banned in the UK](#), 26 November 2021 and HM Treasury, [Current list of designated persons: Counter terrorism \(international\)](#), 16 June 2022, pp3-4

<sup>2</sup> [How Hamas duped Israel as it planned devastating attack](#), Reuters, 10 October 2023; [Netanyahu touts 'initiative' to free hostages in Gaza as pressure mounts](#), CNN, 22 January 2024

<sup>3</sup> Security Council Report, [The Middle East\[...\] emergency closed consultation](#), 7 October 2023

<sup>4</sup> [Security Council confirms Israel at war \[...\]](#), Times of Israel, 8 October 2023

<sup>5</sup> [Palestinian President Abbas condemns violence against civilians](#), Reuters, 12 October 2023

following the 2006 victory by Hamas in parliamentary elections. In 2007, fighting between Hamas and [Fatah](#) (the majority party of the Palestinian Authority) resulted in Hamas taking control of Gaza.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 Israeli air strikes and actions in Gaza

On 9 October 2023 Israel said it had recovered most of the Israeli territory initially taken by Hamas.<sup>7</sup>

On 11 October 2023, a cross-government war cabinet was formed in Israel, bringing some opposition figures into government.<sup>8</sup>

On 28 October, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) commenced a ground offensive in Gaza. The Israeli Government said it aims to “destroy Hamas’ governing and military capabilities and to bring the hostages home”.<sup>9</sup>

On 14 January the IDF said it had struck 30,000 targets in Gaza and killed 10,000 “Hamas operatives and members of other terror groups” since 7 October. It said over 9,000 “projectiles” had been fired from Gaza into Israel and 2,000 from Lebanon (the data does not include “hundreds” of rockets).<sup>10</sup> The pace of rocket attacks from Gaza has fallen since the Israeli offensive.<sup>11</sup>

In advance of the 28 October offensive, the Israeli Government told civilians to evacuate northern Gaza.<sup>12</sup> This action drew criticism from the UN Secretary General, who called the evacuation order “dangerous and deeply troubling” and for Israel to grant “unimpeded access for humanitarian aid” to Gaza.<sup>13</sup> In December, Israel also told civilians to leave parts of southern Gaza.<sup>14</sup>

On 1 January 2024, the IDF said it expected fighting to continue into mid-2024.<sup>15</sup> On 8 January, the IDF said it had “completed the dismantling” of the Hamas command structure in northern Gaza.<sup>16</sup>

On 14 January, US National Security Advisor John Kirby said the US had been talking to the Israeli Government on a “transition to low intensity operations” and that it was “the right time for that transition”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [A guide to Palestinian and other anti-Israeli factions](#), Foreign Affairs, 10 October 2023

<sup>7</sup> [A timeline of the surprise attack by Hamas on Israel](#), ABC News, updated 18 October 2023

<sup>8</sup> [Israel’s Netanyahu, Gantz reach deal to form emergency government](#), Al-Monitor, 11 October 2023

<sup>9</sup> [Israel launches Gaza war’s second phase with ground operation\[...\]](#), Reuters, 28 October 2023

<sup>10</sup> [The war in numbers: 9,000 Hamas members killed](#), Times of Israel, 14 January 2024

<sup>11</sup> [Flight from Eliat lands at Ben Gurion airport \[...\]](#), Times of Israel, 10 December 2023

<sup>12</sup> [Palestinians flee northern Gaza after Israel orders 1 million to evacuate \[...\]](#), AP, 13 October 2023

<sup>13</sup> UN, [Why Israel must reconsider its Gaza evacuation order](#), 13 October 2023

<sup>14</sup> [Israel’s new Gaza evacuation leaves Palestinians few places to go](#), BBC News, 6 December 2023

<sup>15</sup> [Israel to pull some troops from Gaza as war enters new phase](#), Reuters, 1 January 2024

<sup>16</sup> [Hamas command in northern Gaza destroyed, Israel says](#), BBC News, 7 January 2024

<sup>17</sup> [Full transcript of “Face the Nation”](#), CBS News, 14 January 2024

In February, an Israeli Minister said the IDF would extend its operations to Rafah, if Hamas does not release its hostages by 10 March.<sup>18</sup>

Governments of the UK, United States, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia are among those to have warned Israel against such an offensive.<sup>19</sup> Around 1.5 million Palestinians are estimated to be in Rafah (it had a pre-conflict population of 250,000). The Egyptian Government opposes any movement of Palestinian refugees into Egypt from Gaza, including on a temporary basis.<sup>20</sup>

## 1.3

## Humanitarian situation and access

### Situation reports by UN agencies

Gaza is heavily dependent on Israeli energy and water,<sup>21</sup> and Israel has restricted the delivery of fuel, water, and energy to Gaza, citing concerns fuel could be used by Hamas.<sup>22</sup> From November 2023, Israel has allowed in limited amounts of fuel to support the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA). The agency said a lack of fuel had hindered its work.<sup>23</sup>

UN agencies have reported fighting, military operations, or air strikes in and around hospitals, schools, and places of shelter in Gaza. An estimated 85% of 2.2 million population are now displaced within Gaza.<sup>24</sup>

The pause from 24 November to 1 December allowed an increased amount of aid to be delivered (see below for the information on the pause). However, in January 2024 the World Food Programme, Unicef and the World Health Organization said that humanitarian work was “seriously limited” by the closure of all but two border crossings and “constantly shifting battle fronts”.<sup>25</sup>

In December 2023, the World Food Programme said 576,600 Palestinians (26% of the population of Gaza) had exhausted their food supplies and the entire 2.2 million population are “in crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity”. It said there is a “risk of famine” within six months if the conflict between Hamas and Israel does not recede and aid access is not increased.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> [Israel indicates Mach deadline for Gaza ground offensive](#), BBC News, 19 February 2024

<sup>19</sup> [Netanyahu insists on Rafah offensive as warnings mount](#), BBC News, 11 February 2024

<sup>20</sup> [UN warns of ‘slaughter’](#), BBC News, 14 February 2024

<sup>21</sup> Unicef, [The Gaza Strip. The humanitarian impact of 15 years of blockade](#), June 2022

<sup>22</sup> [Defence Minister announces ‘complete siege’ of Gaza \[...\]](#), Times of Israel, 9 October 2023; [UN says fuel shortages will halt Gaza aid operations within a day](#), CNN, 26 October 2023

<sup>23</sup> [Israel to allow some fuel into Gaza after US push-officials](#), Reuters, 18 November 2023

<sup>24</sup> UNRWA, [Situation report 35](#), 22 November 2023; UNOCHA, [Flash update 46](#), 21 November 2023

<sup>25</sup> World Food Programme, [Preventing famine and deadly disease outbreak \[...\]](#), 15 January 2024

<sup>26</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, [Special brief—Gaza strip](#) (PDF), December 2023, p2

A January 2024 preliminary assessment by the UN Conference on Trade and Development estimated that gross domestic product per person in Gaza fell 26% during 2023 and 18% of all structures had been damaged or destroyed.<sup>27</sup>

Also in January, alongside other donors including the EU and US, the UK suspended its aid to UNRWA in response to reports that “several” of its staff were involved in the 7 October Hamas assault.<sup>28</sup> An independent UN investigation has been launched. Section 2 of the Commons Library research briefing, [UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip: FAQs](#), provides more information.

## Humanitarian aid into Gaza

There are three crossing points in and out of Gaza: Rafah, operated by Egyptian authorities and primarily used for people; Kerem Shalom, a goods crossing between Israel and Gaza; and Erez, also primarily used for people.

Egypt has restricted movement at Rafah since Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007. Access to the crossing was initially limited after 7 October 2023, though the Egyptian Government said the crossing was not officially closed but became inoperable due to the Israeli air strikes on the Gaza side.<sup>29</sup>

On 18 October Israel agreed to Rafah’s reopening for humanitarian aid only.<sup>30</sup> From 1 November, up to 500 foreign nationals and injured Palestinians have been allowed to cross into Egypt daily.<sup>31</sup> Egypt has said it will provide support if large numbers of Palestinians are displaced from Gaza to Egypt but said such large-scale movement would be unacceptable.<sup>32</sup> President Sisi says the Egyptian Government “rejects any attempt to resolve the Palestinian issue [...] through [...] forced displacement [of Palestinians] from their land”.<sup>33</sup>

On 17 December, Kerem Shalom was opened to humanitarian aid.<sup>34</sup> UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths said it is “the only crossing” able to “process a sufficiently large number of [aid] trucks”.<sup>35</sup>

On 31 December, Israel’s Foreign Minister said Israel had agreed for France, Greece, the Netherlands, and the UK to ship aid through a maritime corridor from Cyprus. However, there have been no statements on the corridor’s opening. In January, a UK ship carrying supplies docked in Egypt, not Gaza.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> UN, [Gaza economic recovery could take decades](#), 31 January 2024

<sup>28</sup> Commons Library research briefing, [UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip: FAQs](#), section 2.5

<sup>29</sup> [Gaza aid arrives at border crossing but no plan for delivery yet](#), Reuters, 17 October 2023

<sup>30</sup> [Israel will let Egypt deliver some aid to Gaza \[...\]](#), AP, 18 October 2023

<sup>31</sup> [Rafah crossing: First Britons leave Gaza but others face nervous wait](#), BBC News, 1 November 2023

<sup>32</sup> [Egypt says displacement is unacceptable \[...\]](#), Reuters, 17 February 2024

<sup>33</sup> [Egypt rejects displacement of Palestinians into Sinai, says Sisi](#), Reuters, 18 October 2023

<sup>34</sup> [Aid enters Gaza through Israel’s Kerem Shalom crossing \[...\]](#), Reuters, 17 December 2023

<sup>35</sup> UNOCHA, [Briefing to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East](#), 30 October 2023

<sup>36</sup> [Screened in Cyprus, British and Cypriot aid heads to Gaza via Egypt](#), Reuters, 2 January 2024; [Israel green-lights Cypriot aid plan for Palestinians \[...\]](#), Politico, 31 December 2023

## 1.4

### Situation in the West Bank

Violence is ongoing in the West Bank. UNOCHA reports that 2023 was the “deadliest year” for Palestinians and Israelis in the West Bank since it began recording casualties in 2005 (with 36 Israeli and 506 Palestinian deaths).<sup>37</sup>

In 2024, UNOCHA report ongoing search-and-arrest operations by the IDF, and confrontations and demonstrations, resulting in deaths and injuries.<sup>38</sup>

In February 2024, the US said the West Bank has seen “unprecedented levels of violence by Israeli extremist settlers targeting Palestinians” and “violence by Palestinian extremist militants against Israeli civilians”.<sup>39</sup> UNOCHA states that in 2023 there were 1,229 incidents involving Israeli settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, that resulted in damage or Palestinian casualties. This was the highest total since it began collecting data in 2006.<sup>40</sup>

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has condemned the violence but said “accusations against the settlement movement [are] baseless” and are not representative. The UK has called on the Israeli Government to “take immediate and concrete steps” against violence by settlers (see section 3.5).<sup>41</sup>

## 1.5

### Pauses in fighting

#### Announcement of “tactical, local pauses”

On 9 November, the White House said Israel would begin four-hour pauses in its military operations in northern Gaza. The Israeli Defence Forces have said these are “tactical, local pauses” for the delivery of humanitarian aid and do not constitute a ceasefire.<sup>42</sup> Mr Netanyahu said Israel would not agree to a ceasefire until hostages are released.<sup>43</sup>

#### November 2023 pause for the release of hostages

Following mediation by Qatar and Egypt, a pause in fighting took place from 24 November to 1 December 2023 to allow for the release of hostages taken to Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners in Israel. Hamas released 105

<sup>37</sup> UNOCHA, [Hostilities in Gaza Strip and Israel, flash update 80](#), 30 December 2023

<sup>38</sup> UNOCHA, [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel, flash update 111](#), 5 February 2024

<sup>39</sup> US Department of State (DoS), [Department press briefing](#), 1 February 2024

<sup>40</sup> UNOCHA, [Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel, flash update 94](#), 16 January 2024

<sup>41</sup> [PM pans West Bank attacks by “handful of extremists”](#), Times of Israel, 9 November 2023

<sup>42</sup> [Israeli army says allowing “humanitarian pauses” in Gaza](#), BBC Monitoring, 9 November 2023

<sup>43</sup> [Israel open to ‘tactical little pauses’ to let aid into Gaza, Netanyahu says](#), Politico, 7 November 2023

hostages from Gaza and Israel released 240 Palestinians from Israeli prisons. In February, Israel confirmed the deaths of 31 of the remaining 134 hostages.<sup>44</sup>

Before the pause, the Israeli Government said it would last no longer than ten days from the date of release of the first hostage.<sup>45</sup> When fighting resumed, the Government said it was committed to “releasing the hostages, eliminating Hamas and ensuring Gaza never again constitutes a threat” to Israel.<sup>46</sup> The agreement allowed more fuel and humanitarian aid into Gaza: On the first day of the pause, the UN said the “biggest humanitarian convoy” since 7 October had been delivered to the UNRWA’s reception point in Gaza.<sup>47</sup>

## Reports of further negotiations

In December, Israeli President Isaac Herzog said: “Israel is willing to enter another humanitarian pause and bring in additional humanitarian aid in order to bring back the hostages”.<sup>48</sup> BBC Monitoring reports of public statements by Hamas say it will not agree to the further release of hostages until Israel ends its military operations.<sup>49</sup>

In January and February 2024 there have been reports of ongoing negotiations for a fresh agreement to secure the release of hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, over an extended pause in fighting.<sup>50</sup>

## 1.6 Governing post-conflict Gaza

The Israeli Government, alongside governments such as those of the US and UK, state that Hamas cannot play any role in the government of post-conflict Gaza. Mr Netanyahu has also said Gaza “must be demilitarized, under Israel’s full security control”.<sup>51</sup> He has also said UNRWA should be replaced.<sup>52</sup>

In January the Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, set out four principles for Gaza’s future governance:

1. Israeli security control of Gaza.

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<sup>44</sup> [More than a fifth of hostages in Gaza are dead](#), New York Times, 6 February 2024; UNOCHA, [Flash update 116](#), 14 February 2024

<sup>45</sup> [Cabinet decision on hostage deal published \[...\]](#), Times of Israel, 22 November 2023

<sup>46</sup> Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Statement by the Prime Minister’s Office](#), 1 December 2023

<sup>47</sup> UN, [UN delivers more aid into Gaza on first day of humanitarian pause](#), 24 November 2023

<sup>48</sup> Atlantic Council, [Israeli President Isaac Herzog on the Israel-Hamas war \[...\]](#), 19 December 2023

<sup>49</sup> [Hamas denies reports on negotiating hostage deal with Israel](#), BBC Monitoring, 30 December 2023

<sup>50</sup> [US-led talks ‘seek two month ceasefire in Gaza’](#), The Telegraph, 28 January 2024; [Hamas proposes three-stage ceasefire over 135 days](#), Reuters, 7 February 2024

<sup>51</sup> Israeli Prime Minister’s Office, [Statement by PM Netanyahu](#), 21 January 2024

<sup>52</sup> Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Netanyahu meets with a delegation \[...\]](#), 31 January 2024

2. A Palestinian-led administration (Netanyahu has said the Palestinian Authority should not be allowed to govern Gaza).<sup>53</sup>
3. A multinational task force, including Gulf Arab states, to oversee reconstruction.
4. Egyptian-coordinated control of the Rafah crossing (Netanyahu has also suggested Israeli control of the Gaza-Egypt border zone).<sup>54</sup>

He also said there would be no Israeli settlements established in Gaza (though some Israeli ministers have called for this and for the “voluntary emigration” of Palestinians from Gaza—a statement condemned by the US and UK Governments, among others).<sup>55</sup>

The United Arab Emirates and Qatar have said they will not fund Gaza’s reconstruction until sufficient progress is made on a two-state solution.<sup>56</sup> Both the UK and US have backed a role for the Palestinian Authority, subject to it making reforms (see below sections). The Authority says it is willing to govern Gaza but not without a “political solution for the West Bank”.<sup>57</sup>

On 18 February, the Israeli Cabinet approved a declaration stating Palestinian statehood should be achieved through “direct negotiations between the parties, without preconditions” and rejected proposals for “unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state”. It argued this would be an “unprecedented prize for terrorism and prevent any future peace agreement”.<sup>58</sup>

## Further resources on the situation in Gaza

### Humanitarian situation, aid and maps

- UNRWA, [Gaza emergency](#).
- UNOCHA, [Occupied Palestinian Territories](#). UNOCHA reports [daily casualty statistics](#).
- Commons Library research briefing, [UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip: FAQs](#). Value and monitoring of UK aid, and the role of the UNRWA.
- Institute for the Study of War, [Israel’s military operation in Gaza](#)
- Financial Times, [The Israel-Hamas war in maps: Latest updates](#),

<sup>53</sup> [Netanyahu: PA and Hamas both reject Israel’s existence](#), Times of Israel, 2 December 2023

<sup>54</sup> [Netanyahu says Israel should control Gaza-Egypt border zone](#), Reuters, 31 December 2023

<sup>55</sup> [Israeli defence minister outlines plans for post-war Gaza](#), BBC Monitoring, 5 January 2024; [US, UK, France blast Israeli conference on Gaza resettlement](#), Times of Israel, 30 January 2024

<sup>56</sup> [Gulf states press for two-state roadmap](#), The Guardian, 13 December 2023

<sup>57</sup> [Palestinian PM: We will not run Gaza without solution for West Bank](#), The Guardian, 29 October 2023

<sup>58</sup> Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [PM Netanyahu’s remarks at the start of a government meeting](#), 18 February 2024 and [Israel opposes ‘unilateral’ imposition](#), Reuters, 18 February 2024

### Fact checking services

Fact-checking services are monitoring video and other media. These include:

- [BBC Verify](#). Reporting includes on the [Al-Ahli Arab hospital explosion and Israeli attacks in southern Gaza](#)
- [Channel 4 FactCheck](#). Reporting includes the [Hamis attacks on civilians](#)
- [Bellingcat](#). Netherlands-based investigative group. Reporting includes [Israeli strikes on Jabalia refugee camp targeted at Hamas](#)
- Airwars. UK-based not for profit that assesses civilian harm incidents alongside known sources, including in the [2023/24 conflict](#), using its published [methodology of recording and assessment](#)

### Background and analysis on the outlook for the Israel-Hamas conflict

- Council on Foreign Relations, [What is Hamas?](#), October 2023.
- Washington Institute, [The Israel-Hamas war 2023: FAQs](#), October 2023
- Center for Strategic and International Studies, [The War in Gaza and the death of the two-state solution](#), 11 October 2023
- Italian Institute for International Political Studies, [The “other” wide of the war: West Bank violence escalating](#), 23 November 2023
- International Crisis Group, [With all eyes on Gaza, Israel tightens its grip on the West Bank](#), 24 November 2023
- Chatham House, [Why the time is now for a Palestinian national unity government](#), 28 November 2023
- International Crisis Group, [A way out for Gaza](#), 9 December 2023
- Washington Institute, [How to keep Hamas from bouncing back](#), 9 January 2024
- Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), [In Gaza’s shadow: The Middle East in 2024](#), 10 January 2024
- RUSI, [Gaza: The false allure of the Gallant plan](#), 23 January 2024
- RUSI, [Israel and the West’s future reputational problem](#), 31 January 2024
- Carnegie Endowment, [Governing Gaza after the war: Israeli debates and Palestinian debates](#), February 2024

Section 6 provides more on the response of Iran and Arab Gulf States and escalation of violence in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and the Red Sea since 7 October.



## 2 UK Government statements and position

The Prime Minister has delivered two statements to the Commons on the conflict, on [16 October](#) and [23 October](#) 2023. On 16 October, the Prime Minister described the attack by Hamas against Israel as a “pogrom”. He said:

- The attack was a “fundamental challenge to any idea of co-existence” which he described as “essential” to peace and stability in the region.
- Israel had an “absolute” right to defend itself, deter further incursions, and secure the release of hostages, in line with international humanitarian law.
- The UK would call upon Israel to take “every possible precaution to avoid harming civilians”.<sup>59</sup>

For a full list of parliamentary proceedings on the Israel-Hamas conflict, see the House of Commons Library research briefing, [Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: A parliamentary reading list](#), February 2024.

### 2.1 Three UK priorities

On 16 October, the Prime Minister said the UK response has three elements:

- Working to prevent further escalation and threats against Israel through deploying UK forces to monitor and provide regional surveillance (see section 3.2). The UK will not intervene militarily in Gaza.
- Increasing humanitarian aid for the Occupied Palestinian Territories and calling for humanitarian access to Gaza (see section 3.3).
- Working diplomatically to support stability in the region, including for a two-state solution (see section 3.1 for diplomatic contact).<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> HC Deb, [16 October 2023](#), cc24-5

<sup>60</sup> HC Deb, [16 October 2023](#), cc24-5

## 2.2

## Position on a ceasefire

The UK Government has called for an “immediate humanitarian pause” to get “aid in and hostages out” of Gaza and then for “progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to [...] fighting”.<sup>61</sup>

The Government has emphasised that Hamas wants to “repeat what happened on 7 October” and that Israel has “an absolute right of self-defence to go after the people who perpetrated those terrible events” on 7 October.<sup>62</sup>

### Support for further humanitarian pauses in fighting

The Government has backed pauses in the fighting to allow for aid to be delivered, the release of hostages and for British nationals and others to leave Gaza.<sup>63</sup> Following the pause in fighting which began on 24 November, the Minister for the Middle East, Lord Ahmad, told the UN Security Council that it “should not be a one-off”, and should be built on.<sup>64</sup>

### Reasoning against an immediate ceasefire

Speaking on 11 December, the International Development Minister, Andrew Mitchell set out the Government’s reasoning against an immediate ceasefire:

[...] at the moment a ceasefire is wholly implausible. First of all, Hamas would not agree to one. They have made it absolutely clear that they want to replicate the terrible acts that took place on 7 October [...]

It is much more sensible to try to get these humanitarian pauses, where we have seen some success [...]

We have to have two sides that are willing to sign up to a ceasefire and there is absolutely no suggestion, at any point, that either of them will.<sup>65</sup>

### Support for a “sustainable ceasefire”

In December 2023, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Cameron, along with the German Foreign Minister, set out their support for a “sustainable ceasefire”.<sup>66</sup> The Prime Minister has described a “sustainable ceasefire” and a proposed path to a “permanent ceasefire”:

A ceasefire is clearly not going to last if hostages are still being held [...] and if Hamas, whose stated aim is to destroy Israel, are still able to operate [...]

<sup>61</sup> FCDO, [Humanitarian situation in Gaza: the UK government’s response](#), 6 February 2024

<sup>62</sup> HC Deb, [19 December 2023](#), c1246

<sup>63</sup> HC Deb, [25 October 2023](#), c827

<sup>64</sup> UN, [World must not look away from the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza \[...\]](#), 29 November 2023

<sup>65</sup> HC Deb, [11 December 2023](#), cc615-17

<sup>66</sup> Lord Cameron and Annalena Baerbock, [Why the UK and Germany back a sustainable ceasefire](#), The Times, 16 December 2023

Ahead of a permanent ceasefire, what we would like to see is immediate and sustained humanitarian pauses that allow for the release of more hostages and more aid to enter Gaza.<sup>67</sup>

### Position of UK political parties on a ceasefire

- Labour Party: In February 2024 Keir Starmer called for an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire”.<sup>68</sup> He has also backed the Government’s call for a “sustainable ceasefire”, arguing it would act as a “a foot-in-the-door” to wider political talks, including on a two-state solution.<sup>69</sup> In January 2024, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, said a “humanitarian truce is needed now” and it should lead to a “sustainable ceasefire”.<sup>70</sup> Mr Starmer said the potential Israeli offensive in Rafah “cannot happen”.<sup>71</sup>
- Scottish National Party: The SNP Leader in the Commons, Stephen Flynn, has called for an “immediate ceasefire”.<sup>72</sup> In January 2024, First Minister Humza Yousaf renewed the SNP’s call for a ceasefire and for the UK Government “to demand an end to ‘indiscriminate attacks’” in Gaza.<sup>73</sup>
- Liberal Democrats: Sir Ed Davey has called for a “immediate bilateral ceasefire” between Israel and Hamas as a “step towards peace”.<sup>74</sup>

## 2.3

### Two-state solution and post-conflict Gaza

It is the long-standing position of successive UK Governments to support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with a “safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps”.<sup>75</sup> On 23 October 2023, Mr Sunak said:

The truth is that, in recent years, energy has moved into other avenues such as the Abraham accords and normalisation talks with Saudi Arabia. We support those steps absolutely and believe that they can bolster wider efforts, but we must never lose sight of how essential the two-state solution is. We will work with our international partners to bring renewed energy and creativity to that effort. It will rely on establishing more effective governance for Palestinian

<sup>67</sup> Liaison Committee, Oral evidence: Work of the Prime Minister, HC 419, 19 December 2023, Q18

<sup>68</sup> Labour calls for ‘immediate humanitarian ceasefire’ in Gaza, The Guardian, 20 February 2024

<sup>69</sup> Rishi Sunak piles pressure on Israel [...], The Independent, 18 December 2023

<sup>70</sup> HC Deb, 8 January 2024, c24

<sup>71</sup> Keir Starmer calls for ‘ceasefire that lasts’ in Gaza, Holyrood, 18 February 2024

<sup>72</sup> SNP, We want peace—the UK Government is failing to co-operate [...], 14 November 2023

<sup>73</sup> Scottish Government, First Minister urges UK to hold the Government of Israel to account, 5 January 2024

<sup>74</sup> Liberal Democrats, An immediate bilateral ceasefire in Israel and Gaza, 12 November 2023

<sup>75</sup> UK Government response to e-petition, formally recognise the state of Palestine, 8 June 2021

territories in Gaza and the West Bank. It will also mean challenging actions that undercut legitimate aspirations for Palestinian statehood.<sup>76</sup>

On 29 January 2024 the BBC reported that Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron suggested the UK could bring forward the moment when it recognises a Palestinian state, from being part of a final peace agreement to earlier, as part of the negotiations themselves.<sup>77</sup> In comments to the media he said:

What we've always said is we believe in a two-state solution [...] as part of that, Britain, along with other countries, would recognise Palestine as a country and recognise Palestine at the United Nations and what I'm saying is [...] that can't come at the start of the process but it doesn't have to be at the very end of the process. It could be something we consider as this [...] advance to solution becomes more real.<sup>78</sup>

On 30 January 2024, the International Development Minister, Andrew Mitchell, reiterated that “there is no change” in policy and that the UK “will recognise a Palestinian state at a time when it best serves the objective of peace. Bilateral recognition alone cannot end the occupation”.<sup>79</sup>

## Positions of UK political parties on a two-state solution and recognising a Palestinian state

### Labour Party

The Shadow Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, has said a new UK special envoy on the Middle East should be appointed to “recharge” negotiations on a two-state solution, as a well as a “Western and Arab-led vehicle” established to lead reconstruction and future talks on a two-state solution.<sup>80</sup>

Mr Lammy has said a Labour government “will strive to recognise Palestine as a sovereign state, as part of efforts to contribute to securing a negotiated two-state solution”.<sup>81</sup> Keir Starmer has said statehood “is not in the gift of a neighbour [Israel]. It is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people”.<sup>82</sup>

Shadow Minister for the Middle East, Wayne David, has confirmed this is a shift from the position under Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership, arguing unilateral negotiation by the UK would “count for very little”.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> HC Deb, [23 October 2023](#), c592.

<sup>77</sup> [UK considering recognising Palestinian state, Lord Cameron says](#), BBC News, 29 January 2024

<sup>78</sup> Guardian on YouTube, [David Cameron, UK could recognise a Palestinian state \[...\]](#), 2 February 2024

<sup>79</sup> HC Deb, [30 January 2024](#), cc705, 706

<sup>80</sup> David Lammy MP, [Labour will work for a Palestinian state](#), The Guardian, 4 November 2023; David Lammy, [Labour will oppose expulsion of Palestinians \[...\]](#), The Guardian, 9 December 2023

<sup>81</sup> David Lammy MP, [Labour will work for a Palestinian state](#), 4 November 2023

<sup>82</sup> Labour Party, [Keir Starmer’s speech on the international situation \[...\]](#), 31 October 2023

<sup>83</sup> [Keir Starmer drops Corbyn-era policy \[...\]](#), The Jewish Chronicle, 15 January 2024

### Scottish National Party

First Minister Humza Yousaf has called for the UK to recognise a Palestinian state as a means to “break, once and for all, the political impasse” in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>84</sup> SNP Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Brendan O’Hara has said statehood is a “inalienable right, not a privilege conferred by others”.<sup>85</sup> The First Minister argues “it is only with full recognition of Palestine, [...] that we can truly move forward on a two-state solution”.<sup>86</sup>

### Liberal Democrats

The party has called for an immediate bilateral ceasefire to “point the way to two-states” and “provide space for a political solution”.<sup>87</sup>

The Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Layla Moran, has presented a Private Member’s Bill on UK recognition of a Palestinian state (see [Palestinian Statehood \(Recognition\) Bill 2023-24](#)), arguing UK recognition would encourage other countries, including the United States, to act.<sup>88</sup>

The International Development Minister has said both Israel and the Palestinian Authority must take steps to support a two-state solution:

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has an important long-term role to play. We already provide technical and practical support to the PA, and will work with our allies to continue this, and do more. But the Palestinian Authority also must take much needed steps on reform, including setting out a pathway to democratic progress. And just as the PA must act, so must Israel, which means releasing frozen funds, halting settlement expansion and holding to account those responsible for extremist settler violence.<sup>89</sup>

He also laid out five priorities for UK diplomacy in post-conflict Gaza:

[...] a political horizon that provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution; forming a new Palestinian government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; removing Hamas’s capacity to launch attacks against Israel; the release of all Israeli hostages; and key Hamas leaders agreeing to leave Gaza.<sup>90</sup>

The UK Government has also said that Gaza “will be part of a future Palestinian state” and rejected suggestions that Palestinians be relocated:

Gaza is Occupied Palestinian Territory and will be part of a future Palestinian state. The UK firmly rejects any suggestion of the resettlement of Palestinians

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<sup>84</sup> Scottish Government, [Gaza and Israel: First Minister letter to UK Government](#), 21 November 2023

<sup>85</sup> HC Deb, [30 January 2024](#), c704

<sup>86</sup> Scottish Government, [Scottish Parliament votes for immediate \[... ceasefire\]](#), 21 November 2023

<sup>87</sup> Liberal Democrats, [Israel-Gaza conflict](#), 13 November 2023

<sup>88</sup> HC Deb, [17 March 2023](#), c1159

<sup>89</sup> PQ 13351 [[Israel: Palestinians](#)], 16 February 2024

<sup>90</sup> HC Deb, [29 January 2024](#), c620

outside of Gaza. We share the concerns of our allies and partners that Gazans should not be subject to forcible displacement or relocation from Gaza.<sup>91</sup>

## 2.4 Israeli settler violence

The Government has condemned the violence by some Israeli settlers in the West Bank. In December 2023, it said it would introduce restrictions on perpetrators' ability to enter the UK (see below, section 3.5).

In November 2023, the Minister for the Americas and the Caribbean, David Rutley, said the Government condemns “any incidence of violence against settlers by Palestinians” and that Israel “must take tangible steps to grip settler violence” and hold those responsible to account:

Our position is clear: we strongly condemn any incidence of violence against settlers by Palestinians. Reports of Palestinian civilians being murdered by settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) are appalling. Israel must take tangible steps to grip settler violence, and to hold those responsible accountable. The Prime Minister and the former Foreign Secretary [James Cleverly] have raised this with Prime Minister Netanyahu and [Israeli] Foreign Minister Cohen, and we have also stressed the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.<sup>92</sup>

The UK issued a joint statement in December with the European Union and 13 other states “call[ing] on Israel to take immediate and concrete steps to tackle record high settler violence”.<sup>93</sup>

In December 2023, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, also called for “entry bans” on those engaged in “attacks [by Israeli settlers], serious criminal activity or fostering hatred” in the West Bank.<sup>94</sup>

## 2.5 International humanitarian law

### Adherence to international humanitarian law

The UK Government says “all countries must abide by international humanitarian law and the rules of law”.<sup>95</sup> In February, Lord Cameron said:

Israel must obey international humanitarian law. Let us be clear: not only does that involve what the IDF does in terms of the way it prosecutes this war but, as Israel is the occupying power in Gaza, it has to make sure that humanitarian

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<sup>91</sup> FCDO, [UK statement on the situation in Gaza](#), 3 January 2024

<sup>92</sup> PQ 892 [[West Bank: violence](#)], 20 November 2023

<sup>93</sup> FCDO, [Joint statement on West Bank settler violence](#), 15 December 2023

<sup>94</sup> David Lammy MP, [Labour will oppose expulsion of Palestinians \[...\]](#), The Guardian, 9 December 2023

<sup>95</sup> HC Deb, [8 November 2023](#), c165

aid—food, water and shelter—is available to people in Gaza. If Israel does not do that, it would be a breach of international humanitarian law as well.<sup>96</sup>

In December 2023, Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Alicia Kearns argued that Israel’s actions in Gaza had “gone past self-defence” and that “international law had been broken” by Israel (as well as by Hamas).<sup>97</sup> Former Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, also argued that “Israel’s original legal authority of self-defence is being undermined by its own actions” in Gaza, including through “collective punishment and forced movement of civilians”.<sup>98</sup> The Labour Shadow Secretary of State for Health, Wes Streeting, also argued in February 2024 that Israel’s actions were “beyond self-defence”.<sup>99</sup>

The Foreign Secretary has said the UK regularly raises international law:

What we have done on every occasion of talking, whether to the Israeli Prime Minister or President, or to Minister Dermer or Minister Gantz, [...] is always make the point that of course we believe Israel has a right to defend itself and to deal with the Hamas threat, but it has to do so within international humanitarian law and it should try to avoid civilian casualties. We are very clear that they needed to do better in the south than they did in the north.<sup>100</sup>

## The role of the International Criminal Court (ICC)

The [ICC is an international court](#) (PDF) dedicated to prosecuting individuals for “the most serious crimes of international concern”. It is a court of last resort, complementing, but not replacing, local criminal courts.<sup>101</sup>

The Palestinian Authority joined the ICC in 2015, a move opposed by the Israeli Government, which has rejected ICC jurisdiction on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>102</sup> In November 2023, the Chief Prosecutor of the ICC, Karim Khan, said his office has “jurisdiction over current events in Gaza and in the West Bank”.<sup>103</sup> The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Alex Chalk, said the question of the ICC’s jurisdiction was a matter for the court:

Questions about prosecution are matters for independent prosecutors. It is not for Ministers in this Parliament to make that sort of decision: that will be a matter for independent prosecutors, whom I would expect to exercise their discretion freely and fairly.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> HL Deb, [13 February 2024](#), c141

<sup>97</sup> [Israel has gone beyond self-defence in Gaza, Tory MP \[...\] says](#), BBC News, 18 December 2023

<sup>98</sup> Ben Wallace MP, [Netanyahu’s tactics are weakening Israel](#), The Telegraph, 17 December 2023

<sup>99</sup> [Israel’s actions in Gaza have gone ‘beyond reasonable self defence’](#), The Independent, 19 February 2024

<sup>100</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee, [Oral evidence, HC 325](#), 9 January 2024, Q625

<sup>101</sup> Commons Library research briefing, [Recent developments at the ICC](#), January 2021

<sup>102</sup> Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Israel rejects the ICC’s decision regarding the scope of its territorial jurisdiction \[...\]](#), 7 February 2021; ICC, [State of Palestine: Situation \(Investigation\)](#)

<sup>103</sup> Karim Khan in the Guardian, [We are witnessing a pandemic of inhumanity: To halt the spread, we must cling to the law](#), 10 November 2023

<sup>104</sup> HC Deb, [21 November 2023](#), c178

On 4 December, the Minister for Europe and Central Asia, Leo Docherty, said the UK was not “at this stage” in a position to provide evidence to the ICC on possible breaches of international humanitarian law, but that the Government will “continue to take note” of its work.<sup>105</sup>

In response to parliamentary questions on whether the UK would share any footage from its surveillance drones over Gaza (see section 3.2) with the ICC, the International Development Minister said on 12 December that if evidence relating to international humanitarian law was available it would be put before the “relevant authority”:

[...] it is not just Government but many different organisations that are seeking to identify what is happening on the ground, and the extent to which international humanitarian law is being abided with. Any such evidence will undoubtedly be put before the relevant authority—the courts that he [the Member] mentioned [the ICC], specifically—if such evidence is available.<sup>106</sup>

## The role of the International Court of Justice (ICJ)

The [ICJ is the UN’s highest court](#) and in January 2024 it issued a preliminary order on Israel’s actions in Gaza in response to a case brought by South Africa. Section 4.4 provides background on the preliminary orders.

The UK Government argues South Africa’s case, [brought under the 1948 Genocide Convention](#), is “provocative” and “not helpful in the goal of achieving a sustainable ceasefire”. It says Israel’s actions in Gaza “cannot be described as genocide”.<sup>107</sup>

Speaking in the Commons in January 2024, the International Development Minister Andrew Mitchell said some of the court’s provisional measures (see section 4.4) were steps the UK Government had already raised, such as increased aid, the immediate release of hostages, and for all parties to be bound by international humanitarian law.<sup>108</sup> At the UN, the Government [reiterated its position](#) that it is “for courts, not governments, to determine genocide”.<sup>109</sup>

Labour’s Shadow Foreign Secretary said Israel “must now comply with the orders in [the] ruling in full” and that the orders “align closely” with the party’s previous calls for a humanitarian truce and sustainable ceasefire.<sup>110</sup> The SNP’s Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Brendan O’Hara, also called on the UK Government to ensure Israel complies with court’s provisional measures.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> HC Deb, [4 December 2023](#), c34

<sup>106</sup> HC Deb, [12 December 2023](#), c725, see also HC Deb, [5 December 2023](#), c216

<sup>107</sup> FCDO, [ICJ interim ruling on South Africa vs Israel](#), 27 January 2024

<sup>108</sup> HC Deb, [29 January 2024](#), c621

<sup>109</sup> FCDO, [We continue to work intensively with the UN and partners \[...\]](#), 31 January 2024

<sup>110</sup> [Israel must comply with ‘profoundly serious ICJ ruling \[...\]](#), The Independent, 26 January 2024

<sup>111</sup> [SNP urges Cameron to be on ‘right side of history’](#), ITV News, 28 January 2024



## 2.6

## UK arms sales to Israel

In response to a parliamentary question on whether the UK had assessed the potential impact of arms sales to Israel on civilian deaths and compliance with international humanitarian law, on 20 November 2023 the Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps, said:

All [UK] export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the strategic export licence criteria. This Government will not use any export licences to any destination where applications are not consistent with the criteria. [...]

our defence exports to Israel are relatively small—just £42 million last year [...].<sup>112</sup>

In response to a separate question, the Minister of State for Defence, James Cartlidge, said the Government is monitoring the situation closely and “if extant licences are found to be no longer consistent with the criteria, those licences will be revoked”.<sup>113</sup>

More information can be found in the Commons Library research briefing, [UK arms exports to Israel](#), February 2024. The criteria for UK arms exports are set out in the Commons Library research briefing, [UK amends its criteria for arms exports](#), November 2023. The UK applies eight criteria to assess these applications (see sections 2 to 10 of the briefing) which include respecting human rights, determining if the provision of arms would undermine peace and security, and whether provision would undermine UK national security or that of allied countries.

SNP Defence Spokesperson, Martin Docherty-Hughes, has argued the UK Government should “cease extending arms licences to the state of Israel and to immediately halt the export of weapons or components” to the country.<sup>114</sup>

## 2.7

## Reports of sexual violence by Hamas

Reports of sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October are currently under investigation by Israeli authorities and [the UN Commission of Inquiry into Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories](#).<sup>115</sup>

On 15 December the UK Middle of the Middle East, Lord Ahmad, expressed “serious concern” and called for a full investigation:

<sup>112</sup> HC Deb, [20 November 2023](#), c2

<sup>113</sup> PQ 203627 [[Israel: Arms trade](#)], 26 October 2023

<sup>114</sup> HC Deb, [12 December 2023](#), c226WH

<sup>115</sup> [UN commission to investigate Hamas sexual violence\[...\]](#), Reuters, 30 November 2023; [Israel police open investigation into sexual violence during Oct 7 attack](#), Reuters, 14 November 2023

We express serious concern about emerging reports of sexual violence, against both women and men, while they were held in Hamas captivity in Gaza [...] The UK condemns sexual violence unequivocally and without exception. These reports must be fully investigated to ensure justice for survivors and victims.<sup>116</sup>

In December 2023, the Prime Minister said the reports of sexual violence are “shocking” and that the Government had raised its concerns with the UN in November. The UK Government is engaging with that of Israel on what support the UK can provide.<sup>117</sup> Hamas has denied the allegations.<sup>118</sup>

## 2.8

# Forced displacement of Palestinians

## Israel’s evacuation order for parts of Gaza

In response to a question on Israel’s evacuation order for northern Gaza, in October 2023 the Prime Minister said: “Israel is attempting to minimise the impact on civilians by asking people to leave northern Gaza”.<sup>119</sup>

Minister David Rutley has said those displaced “should only return home only when it is safe to do so and in a dignified and voluntary manner”.<sup>120</sup>

In response to the potential Israeli offensive in Rafah, on 13 February 2024 Lord Cameron said “it is not possible” for displaced Palestinians to “move again”:

They cannot go north because they would be going back to homes that have been destroyed. They cannot go south because that would involve going into Egypt, which none of us wants to see and the Egyptians do not want.<sup>121</sup>

## Statements by some Israeli ministers on encouraging voluntary emigration of Palestinians from Gaza

In January 2024, the UK Minister for the Middle East criticised as “inflammatory” remarks by two Israeli ministers advocating the resettlement of Palestinians outside Gaza.<sup>122</sup> The UK reiterated its position that “Gaza is Occupied Palestinian Territory and will be part of a future Palestinian state”.<sup>123</sup>

The Government has also said “any forced displacement [from Gaza] is incompatible with [a two-state solution], and the Prime Minister and former

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<sup>116</sup> FCDO, [Reports of sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas](#), 15 December 2023

<sup>117</sup> HC Dec, [13 December 2023](#), c896

<sup>118</sup> [Hamas ‘rejects occupation’s lies on rape cases’ \[...\]](#), BBC Monitoring, 4 December 2023

<sup>119</sup> HC Deb, [16 October 2023](#), c29

<sup>120</sup> PQ 3409 [[Gaza: Internally displaced people](#)], 6 December 2023

<sup>121</sup> HL Deb, [13 February 2024](#), c141

<sup>122</sup> Lord Ahmad on X/Twitter, [Gaza is occupied Palestinian Territory \[...\]](#), 3 January 2024

<sup>123</sup> FCDO, [UK statement on situation in Gaza](#), 3 January 2024

Foreign Secretary have raised this with [their] Israeli counterparts”.<sup>124</sup> The UK has also raised the issue at the UN Security Council.<sup>125</sup>

The Prime Minister said the UK “recognis[es] that there must be no forcible displacement from Gaza” into Egypt and other states.<sup>126</sup>

In response to a January conference held in Jerusalem attended by some Israeli ministers calling for the establishment of Israeli settlement in Gaza, the UK Government reiterated its position that “settlements are illegal [and] no Palestinian should be threatened with forcible displacement or relocation”.<sup>127</sup>

## 2.9 British nationals in Gaza

The UK Government has not confirmed the number of British nationals held hostage in Gaza. Previously, on 7 November 2023 the Justice Secretary said the Government believed there were three British nationals held hostage.<sup>128</sup>

On 11 December 2023, Foreign Office Minister Leo Docherty confirmed 15 British nationals had been killed since 7 October.<sup>129</sup>

On 8 February 2024, Minister Andrew Mitchell said the UK has helped 300 British nationals leave Gaza and “a small number remain”.<sup>130</sup>

## 2.10 Funding to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim incidents

Following reports of a rise in antisemitic offenses in the UK, in October 2023 the Prime Minister announced £3 million in funding for [the Community Security Trust \(CST\)](#) for Jewish community buildings, synagogues, and schools in the UK.<sup>131</sup> The CST is a charity that protects Jews from antisemitism and other threats. In the November 2023 Autumn statement, the Chancellor said he would repeat this £3 million funding to the CST next year.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> PQ 1693 [[Gaza: Palestinians](#)], 21 November 2023

<sup>125</sup> FCDO, [Gazans should not be subject to forcible displacement \[...\]](#), 12 January 2024

<sup>126</sup> PMO, [PM meeting with Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi](#), 1 December 2023

<sup>127</sup> FCDO, [‘Settlements bring security’ conference in Jerusalem](#), 30 January 2024

<sup>128</sup> [Three British hostages are still in Gaza, says Justice secretary](#), The Telegraph, 7 November 2023

<sup>129</sup> HC Deb, [11 December 2023](#), c225WH

<sup>130</sup> PQ 13079 [[Gaza: British nationals abroad](#)], 8 February 2024

<sup>131</sup> HC Deb, [16 October 2023](#), cc23

<sup>132</sup> HM Treasury, [Autumn statement 2023](#), 22 November 2023, p32

The Chancellor also announced up to a further £7 million for organisations such as the [Holocaust Memorial Trust](#) to address antisemitism over the next three years, including in schools and universities.<sup>133</sup>

Before the conflict, in June 2023 the Government announced £24.5 million in 2023/24 to protect mosques and Muslim faith schools under the [Protective Security for Mosques Scheme](#). Available funding for the scheme has been increased 20% since the June announcement.<sup>134</sup>

## 2.11

## Parliamentary votes in the UK

### UK Parliament

On 15 November, the Commons voted on two amendments to the [Motion for the Loyal Address](#) (The King’s Speech debates) made by Labour and the SNP on the conflict between Israel and Hamas. Neither amendment passed.<sup>135</sup>

Labour’s amendment (r) welcomed the announcement of temporary humanitarian pauses but called for them to be extended as a “necessary step to an enduring cessation of fighting as soon as possible”. It was defeated by 290 votes to 183.<sup>136</sup> The full amendment can be read in Hansard for [15 November 2023](#), at column 674.

The SNP’s amendment (h) called on the Government to “join with the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire”. It was defeated by 293 votes to 125.<sup>137</sup> The amendment can be read in full in Hansard for [15 November 2023](#), at columns 755 to 757.

Responding for the Government, the Minister for Policing, Chris Philp said:

A ceasefire with Hamas in place cannot be just. Hamas have said that they intend to destroy Israel, and that they would once again perpetrate atrocities like those committed on 7 October. They continue to hold hostages, including children and British citizens, and they continue to fire rockets into Israel. To ask Israel to cease firing unilaterally would not be fair or just.<sup>138</sup>

For their opposition day debate on 21 February 2024, the SNP are expected to bring a motion for an immediate ceasefire.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> HM Treasury, [Autumn statement 2023](#), 22 November 2023, p32

<sup>134</sup> PQ 3471 [[Racial discrimination](#)], 28 November 2023

<sup>135</sup> HC Deb, [15 November 2023](#), cc674-764

<sup>136</sup> HC Deb, [15 November 2023](#), cc755-57

<sup>137</sup> HC Deb, [15 November 2023](#), cc757-761

<sup>138</sup> HC Deb, [15 November 2023](#), c753

<sup>139</sup> [Sir Keir Starmer calls for Gaza ‘ceasefire that lasts’](#), BBC News, 18 February 2024

## Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru

On 8 November 2023 the Welsh Parliament voted in favour (24 to 19 votes) of a Plaid Cymru motion on the conflict. The motion condemned the 7 October Hamas attack, demanded the release of hostages, for international humanitarian law to be upheld, and for an immediate ceasefire.

[The Parliament's webpage for 8 November 2023 plenary sessions](#) has the full motion for the debate and a [record of the proceedings](#).

## Scottish Parliament motion

On 21 November, the Scottish Parliament supported a SNP Government motion by 90 votes to 28 that condemned the 7 October Hamas attack, demanded the unconditional release of hostages, the upholding of international humanitarian law, and for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.<sup>140</sup>

The full motion is available on the Scottish Parliament's website, [The situation in the Middle East, S6011342](#), 21 November 2023 and the full debate in the [Parliament's Official report for 21 November 2023](#).

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<sup>140</sup> Scottish Parliament, [The situation in the Middle East, S6M-11342](#), 21 November 2023

## 3 UK Government actions

### 3.1 UK diplomatic activity

UK Government ministers have met with leaders and ministers of Israel, Turkey, Jordan, Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, and the Arab League.<sup>141</sup>

In 2024, Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron has been seeking to build a “contact group” between the US, UK, “key” European Union, Gulf and Arab countries and Turkey to “build momentum towards a lasting solution” to the conflict.<sup>142</sup>

#### UK Prime Minister’s contact with Israeli Prime Minister

On 8 October 2023 the UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.<sup>143</sup> Mr Sunak said the UK would “continue to provide [support to Israel]—whether that’s diplomatic, intelligence or security support—as they need”.<sup>144</sup> Mr Sunak has reiterated Israel’s right to defend itself against Hamas:

Hamas can never again be able to perpetrate atrocities against the Israeli people. Noting that Hamas has enmeshed itself in the civilian population in Gaza, the Prime Minister said it was important to take all possible measures to protect ordinary Palestinians and facilitate humanitarian aid.<sup>145</sup>

The Prime Minister has also raised Israeli settler violence in the West Bank directly with Mr Netanyahu and the “need to allow more aid into Gaza [and] to take all possible measures to minimise civilian casualties”.<sup>146</sup>

#### Prime Minister’s contact with Palestinian Authority

Mr Sunak has met with the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. They discussed avoiding further escalation and ensuring calm in the West Bank, the UK’s support for the Palestinian Authority in trying to secure peace and security, and humanitarian support for Gaza.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>141</sup> For sources, see section 6 of the Commons Library briefing, [Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: A parliamentary reading list \(2020-23\)](#)

<sup>142</sup> FCDO, [Foreign Secretary returns to the Middle East](#), 30 January 2024

<sup>143</sup> Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), [PM call with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel](#), 8 October 2023

<sup>144</sup> [Sunak says UK is “poised” to offer Israel military help if required](#), The Guardian, 9 October 2023

<sup>145</sup> PMO, [Call with \[...\] Netanyahu](#), 13 October 2023; [Meeting with the Prime Minister](#), 19 October 2023

<sup>146</sup> HC Deb, [7 November 2023](#), c17

<sup>147</sup> PMO, [Meeting with the President \[...\] of the Palestinian Authority](#), 20 October 2023

## Foreign Secretary contact with Iran

In February, Lord Cameron said Iran would be “held accountable” for its “proxies” in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere and that he had had a “robust conversation” with Iran’s foreign minister on this point.<sup>148</sup> Previous UK-Iran conversations on de-escalation took place in November and December.<sup>149</sup>

## 3.2

## Deployment of UK military forces

### Actions in the Red Sea against the Houthis

For UK military action, see the Commons Library research briefing, [UK and international response to Houthis in the Red Sea 2024](#). The briefing, [UK forces in the Middle East](#), provides background on the UK’s recent military presence in the region.

On 13 October 2023, [the UK Government announced it would deploy some UK military assets to the eastern Mediterranean](#) to “support Israel, reinforce regional stability and prevent escalation.” Assets deployed are:<sup>150</sup>

- 12 maritime patrol and surveillance aircraft, to patrol against the potential transfer of weapons to terrorist groups.
- A Royal Navy task group to deliver humanitarian aid. It includes aircraft, helicopters, royal marines, and two ships (RFS Lyme Bay and RFA Angus).
- An additional destroyer, HMS Diamond, to support [Operation Kipion](#) (the UK’s existing maritime presence in the Gulf and Indian Ocean).<sup>151</sup> HMS Diamond was replaced by HMS Richmond in February 2024.<sup>152</sup>
- 2,500 military personnel (up 1,000 since 7 October).<sup>153</sup> Some have been deployed to Tel Aviv, Beirut, and Jordan to protect British citizens.<sup>154</sup>

The Secretary of State for Defence has said there will be no deployment of UK forces in Israel or the Occupied Palestinian Territories (including in the period following the conflict). He said any military action by UK forces will be in defence of British citizens and British interests.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> [Cameron: Iran will be held ‘accountable’](#), BBC News, 4 February 2024

<sup>149</sup> Lord Cameron on X/Twitter, [Spoke to Amir-Abdollahian today about Houthi attacks \[...\]](#), 31 December 2023; FCDO, [Foreign Secretary’s call with Iranian Foreign Minister](#), 3 November 2023

<sup>150</sup> PQ 48 [[Military aircraft: Mediterranean region](#)], 12 November 2023

<sup>151</sup> Ministry of Defence, [Defence Secretary sends Royal Navy destroyer east of Suez](#), 30 November 2023

<sup>152</sup> Royal Navy, [HMS Richmond takes over from HMS Diamond](#), 6 February 2024

<sup>153</sup> Ministry of Defence, [Defence Secretary visits Israel and OPTs \[...\]](#), 7 December 2023

<sup>154</sup> HC Deb, [20 November 2023](#), c4

<sup>155</sup> HC Deb, [5 December 2023](#), cc218, 219

From 5 December, the UK Government extended existing unarmed surveillance flights over the eastern Mediterranean to include Gaza. These flights are tasked solely with locating hostages. Announcing the action, the Defence Secretary said that “only information relating to hostage rescue will be passed to the relevant authorities responsible for hostage rescue”.<sup>156</sup>

### UK military and other aid to Israel

In December, the Ministry of Defence said that, during the current conflict, it would provide Israel with “only defensive [military] matériel, or matériel that might help with the recovery of hostages”.<sup>157</sup>

To 11 December, no UK military equipment has been provided. It has provided some life-saving medical supplies, including defibrillators, to Israel.<sup>158</sup>

No UK Government financial support has been provided to Israel during the conflict. Israel is ineligible to receive aid from the UK’s aid budget under internationally agreed aid rules because it is a high-income economy.<sup>159</sup>

## 3.3

### UK humanitarian aid

The Commons Library research briefing, [UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip: FAQs](#), provides more on UK aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including the temporary suspension of funding to UNRWA.

The FCDO, [Gaza: what you can do to help](#), provides advice for individuals and companies making safe donations to support the humanitarian response.

Since 7 October 2023, the UK Government has announced £60 million in aid for the OPTs. This is additional to earlier commitments announced in July and September 2023 which totalled £27 million in aid during 2023/24. It has also appointed a humanitarian coordinator to support aid delivery.<sup>160</sup>

The new funding will provide essential items and services such as food, water, and emergency shelter. It will be spent via “trusted partners”, such as UN agencies. The Government says the UK provides no funding to Hamas.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>156</sup> HCWS90 [[Israel and Gaza](#)], 5 December 2023; HC Deb, [5 December 2023](#), c221

<sup>157</sup> HC Deb, [5 December 2023](#), c219

<sup>158</sup> PQ 5417 [[Israel: Military aid](#)], 11 December 2023; PQ 5416 [[Israel: Military aid](#)], 11 December 2023

<sup>159</sup> OECD, [Development Assistance Committee: List of Official Development Assistance recipients](#)

<sup>160</sup> Commons Library research briefing, [UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip: FAQs](#), p6, section 1.3

<sup>161</sup> PMO, [UK announces £10m humanitarian aid for civilians in OPTs](#), 16 October 2023



## 3.4 UK support for Lebanon

Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron says the UK’s strategy in Lebanon is to “work with the Americans and French principally, because they have huge interests, expertise and commitments there” (Lebanon was a French protectorate), though he has met the Lebanese Prime Minister twice since he took office.<sup>162</sup>

The UK supports the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). The LAF supports the [UN Mission in Lebanon](#). This upholds Lebanon’s territorial integrity and acts as a counterbalance to [Iran-aligned Hezbollah](#) (Hezbollah has fought in Syria in support of President Assad and launched direct attacks against Israel).

Since 2009, the UK has provided £100 million to the LAF and £804 million in aid (2010 to 2021), primarily to support Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Visiting Lebanon in February 2024, Lord Cameron reaffirmed UK support for the LAF and announced £10 million in aid for UN agencies.<sup>163</sup>

## 3.5 New UK sanctions and visa restrictions

### Sanctions against Hamas and others

Before October 2023, the UK applied sanctions against Hamas and a range of Iran-aligned groups and individuals in the Middle East, such as Hezbollah.<sup>164</sup> UK sanctions include travel bans, asset freezes and arms embargoes. The UK has since announced further sanctions:

- 14 November 2023: Four members of Hamas and two financiers.<sup>165</sup>
- 13 December: Sanctions against leaders and financiers of Hamas and [Palestinian Islamic Jihad](#).<sup>166</sup>
- 14 December: Designations of seven individuals, including the Hamas representative to Iran and members of Iran’s IRGC.<sup>167</sup>
- 22 January 2024: Five individuals and one entity involved in arranging finance for Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>162</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee, [Oral Evidence, HC325](#), 9 January 2024, Q274

<sup>163</sup> Commons Library, [Lebanon: Introductory country profile](#) and FCDO, [Lebanon’s stability and security are paramount](#), 3 February 2024

<sup>164</sup> Commons Library, [Iran’s influence in the Middle East](#), section 3.2

<sup>165</sup> FCDO, [The UK sanctions list](#); FCDO, [UK and US hit Hamas leadership with targeted sanctions](#), 14 November 2023

<sup>166</sup> FCDO, [UK and US target Hamas with new sanctions to isolate terror group](#), 13 December 2023

<sup>167</sup> FCDO, [New Iranian sanction regime comes into force](#), 14 December 2023

<sup>168</sup> FCDO, [UK, US and Australia sanction key figures in Hamas’ financial network](#), 22 January 2024

## Proscribing Hizb ut-Tahrir as a terrorist group

In January 2024, the Home Secretary announced that under the Terrorism Act 2002 [Hizb ut-Tahrir](#), an armed Islamist group based in Lebanon which operates in 32 countries and praised the Hamas assault of 7 October, would be proscribed as a terrorist group.<sup>169</sup>

For information on the Act and the effects of proscription, see the Commons Library briefing, [Proscribed Terrorist Organisations](#).

## Visa restrictions against Israeli settlers

In December Lord Cameron announced the UK would ban those responsible for settler violence in the West Bank from entering the UK. He called on Israel to “hold the preparators accountable”.<sup>170</sup> In February, the UK imposed travel and financial restrictions against four Israelis.<sup>171</sup>

## UK sanctions against Iran and proscription of IRGC

[Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\)](#) was established as a counterweight to Iran’s regular armed forces following the Iranian revolution of 1979 that overthrew the Shah. In addition to personnel in Iran, it exerts wider influence in the region by providing money, technology, and training.<sup>172</sup>

The UK sanctions the entirety of the IRGC under its nuclear sanctions, meaning it applies asset freezes and travel bans. The Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Sir Ed Davey, Alicia Kearns, and other MPs have called upon the Government to proscribe the IRGC as a terrorist group. This would create offences in the UK for being a member, among other things.<sup>173</sup>

In December 2023, Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron said Iran must be sent “an incredibly clear message that this escalation will not be tolerated”. However, he said proscription of the IRGC as a terrorist organisation was “not something that either the intelligence agencies or the police are calling for” and that the UK can sanction IRGC members.<sup>174</sup>

For more information on the actions of the IRGC and debates on proscription, see section 2.3 of the Commons Library debate pack, [Freedom and democracy in Iran](#), January 2024.

<sup>169</sup> Home Office, [Home Secretary declares Hizb ut-Tahrir as terrorists](#), 15 January 2024

<sup>170</sup> [UK Foreign Secretary announces ban on ‘extremist Israeli settlers’](#), BBC News, 14 December 2023

<sup>171</sup> FCDO, [UK sanctions extremist settlers in the West Bank](#), 12 February 2024

<sup>172</sup> Commons Library, [Iran’s influence in the Middle East](#), p8

<sup>173</sup> HC Deb, [6 July 2023](#), c1001; HC Deb, [16 October 2023](#), cc28-9

<sup>174</sup> [David Cameron: when Rishi asked me to do this job \[...\]](#), The Telegraph, 23 December 2023

## 4 UN response and actions

### 4.1 Statements by the UN Secretary General

In response to the conflict, the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, has:

- condemned the “abhorrent attacks by Hamas and others” on 7 October.
- “recognized” the “legitimate grievances of the Palestinian people” but said “nothing can justify these acts of terror”.
- called for Hamas to immediately cease attacks and release all hostages.
- called for Israel to conduct its military operations in accordance with international humanitarian law.
- said he is “deeply distressed” by Israel’s statement for a “complete siege of the Gaza strip” and called for humanitarian access for UN agencies.
- called for a negotiated peace in line with UN resolutions for a two-state solution.<sup>175</sup> He said failure to achieve such a solution will “indefinitely prolong a conflict” and is the only means to meet the Israel’s needs for security and Palestinian aspirations for an independent state.<sup>176</sup>

Addressing the UN Security Council in January 2024, he reiterated his call for an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire” to avoid regional escalation, secure the release of hostages, and facilitate aid delivery.<sup>177</sup>

In response to provisional orders of the ICJ in January 2024 (see section 4.4), the Secretary General “note[d]” the court’s decision for Israel to “take all measures within its power” in relation to Palestinians in Gaza:

to prevent the commission of acts within the scope of Article II of the [Genocide] Convention, including killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group’s destruction and imposing measures intended to prevent births [...]

[and] special note of the Court’s order to Israel to ensure the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>175</sup> UN, [Press conference: António Guterres](#), 9 October 2023

<sup>176</sup> UN, [UN Secretary General’s remarks to the Security Council](#), 23 January 2024

<sup>177</sup> UN, [UN Chief reiterates Gaza ceasefire call \[...\]](#), 15 January 2024

<sup>178</sup> UN, [Statement attributable to the spokesperson for the Secretary General](#), 26 January 2024

## 4.2

# UN Security Council and General Assembly

Resolutions of the [UN Security Council](#) (UNSC) are binding, unlike those of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). For any resolution of the 15-member Security Council to pass requires nine votes in favour and no vetoes from the five permanent members of the United States, Russia, China, the UK, and France.<sup>179</sup> All members of the UN make up the UNGA.

Two resolutions in each body have passed since October 2023.

## 22 December UNSC resolution 2720 on aid delivery

Russia and the US abstained on the resolution, while the remaining 13 UNSC members voted in favour. Russia, which proposed an amendment calling for a ceasefire, said it abstained because the resolution did not call for this.<sup>180</sup>

The full text of the resolution can be found on the [UN Library site](#). It “demanded” humanitarian aid to Gaza be increased. The Council stated it:

Calls for urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered, and expanded humanitarian access and to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities [...]

Demands that they [the parties to the conflict] allow, facilitate and enable the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale directly to the Palestinian civilian population [...]

Demands that the parties [...] allow and facilitate the use of all available routes to and throughout the entire Gaza Strip, including border crossings [...]

Demands the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access to address medical needs of all hostages [...]

The UK voted in favour to “get more humanitarian aid into Gaza” and welcomed its call to work towards a “sustainable cessation of hostilities”.<sup>181</sup>

Israel’s representative, Brett Jonathan Miller, criticised the resolution for not condemning Hamas and said Israel was already facilitating aid. The Palestinian Authority representative, Riyad Mansour, said the resolution should “be accompanied by massive pressure for an immediate ceasefire”.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>179</sup> UN, [UN Security Council](#)

<sup>180</sup> UN, [Security Council adopts key resolution on Gaza crisis \[...\]](#), 22 December 2023

<sup>181</sup> FCDO, [The UK supports Security Council resolution 2720 on aid to Gaza](#), 22 December 2023

<sup>182</sup> UN, [Security Council adopts key resolution on Gaza crisis \[...\]](#), 22 December 2023

## 15 November 2023 UNSC resolution 2712 on pauses

The US, UK and Russia abstained on the resolution, while the remaining 12 members of the Council voted in favour.<sup>183</sup> The UK and US said they would not support the resolution as it did not condemn the Hamas attack on 7 October. The UK representative nonetheless said the UK “strongly support[s]” the resolution’s purpose: to get aid in, and hostages out”.<sup>184</sup> Russia had proposed an amendment for a ceasefire and abstained on the unamended resolution.

The resolution’s full text can be found on the [UN Library site](#). The UNSC said it:

Demands that all parties comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law [...]

Calls for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors for [...] full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access [...]

Calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages [...]

Calls on all parties to refrain from depriving the civilian population in the Gaza Strip of basic services and humanitarian assistance indispensable to their survival [...]

The Israeli representative to the UN, Gilad Erdan, criticised the resolution for failing to condemn Hamas and argued it was “meaningless.” He said Israel “will continue to act until Hamas is destroyed and the hostages are returned” and that Israel will “continue acting according to international law”.<sup>185</sup>

The Palestinian representative said the resolution should have echoed the call of the UN General Assembly (see below) for an “immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities”.<sup>186</sup>

## Position of China and Russia

China and Russia, alongside France, are the other three permanent members of the UN Security Council. Russia has proposed resolutions for an immediate ceasefire and accused Western countries of blocking progress on a two-state solution.<sup>187</sup> China has called for an “immediate ceasefire” and argues Israel’s actions in Gaza are “beyond the scope of self-defence”.<sup>188</sup> China has been criticised by the US and Israel for not condemning Hamas as a terrorist group.<sup>189</sup> For more, see:

<sup>183</sup> For this and following paragraph: UN, [Security Council calls for urgent, extended humanitarian pauses in Gaza](#), 15 November 2023 and UN, [Security Council 9479 meeting](#), 15 November 2023

<sup>184</sup> FCDO, [It is right the Security Council calls for a humanitarian pause in Gaza \[...\]](#), 15 November 2023

<sup>185</sup> Israeli ambassador Twitter/X, [The UNSC’s resolution is disconnected from reality](#), 15 November 2023

<sup>186</sup> UN, [Israel-Palestine crisis: UNSC calls for urgent, extended humanitarian pauses](#), 15 November 2023

<sup>187</sup> [Arab League chief heads to Moscow to discuss Gaza crisis](#), Arab News, 8 October 2023

<sup>188</sup> [China: Israel’s actions in Gaza ‘beyond scope of self-defence’](#), Middle East Memo, 15 October 2023

<sup>189</sup> [A closer look at China’s position on Hamas](#), BBC Monitoring, 1 November 2023.

- Brookings Institute, [What is Russia’s role in the Israel-Gaza crisis?](#), January 2024
- Chatham House, [China’s approach to the war in Gaza \[...\]](#), October 2023
- Chatham House, [The war in Gaza is aligning Russia against Israel](#), November 2023
- Middle East Institute, [The war in Gaza as a major test of China’s Middle East peace diplomacy](#), October 2023

## UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions

### 27 October 2023

The UNGA voted 121 to 14 (with 44 abstentions) for an [“immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities”](#). The resolution called for all parties to “immediately and fully comply” with obligations under international law, for Hamas to release its hostages, and for Israel to rescind the order for civilians to evacuate northern Gaza.<sup>190</sup>

An amendment, which unequivocally reject[ed] and condemn[ed] the terrorist attacks by Hamas” and the taking of hostages, was not passed.<sup>191</sup>

Israel criticised the resolution as failing to acknowledge its right to defend itself and not condemning Hamas. The US voted against the resolution.<sup>192</sup> The UK abstained and said it “could have been clearer” on condemning Hamas.<sup>193</sup>

### 12 December 2023

The UNGA backed a resolution [“demanding” the release of hostages, an immediate humanitarian ceasefire](#), and for all parties to comply with international humanitarian law. A total of 153 states voted in favour, 10 against (including the US and Israel) and 23 abstentions (including the UK and Germany, citing the lack of condemnation of Hamas).<sup>194</sup> Two amendments condemning Hamas did not gain sufficient votes to pass.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> UN, [Gaza crisis: GA adopts resolution calling for “humanitarian truce”](#), 27 October 2023

<sup>191</sup> As above

<sup>192</sup> UN News Centre on Twitter/X, [UN General Assembly adopts resolution \[...\]](#), 27 October 2023

<sup>193</sup> FCDO, [Hope and humanity must win out \[...\]](#), 27 October 2023

<sup>194</sup> PQ HL1172 [[Gaza: Ceasefires](#)], 29 December 2023

<sup>195</sup> UN, [UN General Assembly votes by large majority \[...\]](#), 12 December 2023

## 4.3

## How has the UK voted at the UN?

## UN Security Council

The UK has not used its veto at the UNSC since 1989, and not on an issue relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the 1956 Suez Crisis.<sup>196</sup>

In the UNSC, disagreements have centred on whether a resolution should seek a humanitarian “ceasefire” or “pause” and if it should condemn the actions of Hamas on 7 October.<sup>197</sup> The UK has been seeking a “balanced text” which condemns Hamas, re-affirms Israel’s right to self-defence, the protection of civilians, and the delivery of aid.<sup>198</sup> The UNSC has passed two resolutions:

- UNSC [Resolution 2720](#), 22 December. The UK voted yes (see page 36).
- UNSC [Resolution 2712](#) on 15 November. The UK abstained (see page 37).

The UNSC has put five other resolutions to a vote:

- 16 October: Resolution [2023-772](#) (PDF). Proposed by Russia. The [UK voted no](#) as it failed to condemn Hamas (as did France, the US and Japan).<sup>199</sup>
- 18 October: Resolution [2023-773](#) (PDF). Proposed by Brazil. Vetoed by the US. The UK abstained, saying it needed to be clearer on Israel’s right to self-defence and condemning the Hamas assault on 7 October.<sup>200</sup>
- 25 October: Resolution [2023/795](#) (PDF). Proposed by Russia. The UK and US voted against (France was among the abstentions). The UK said the resolution “failed to recognise Israel’s right to self-defence”.<sup>201</sup>
- 25 October: Resolution [2023/792](#) (PDF). Proposed by the US. Russia, China, and the UAE voted against. The UK voted yes, stating the draft, “for the first time, unequivocally condemned Hamas’ terrorist attacks”.<sup>202</sup>
- 8 December: [Resolution 2023-970](#) (PDF). Proposed by the UAE. Vetoed by the US. The UK abstained as it did not condemn the Hamas assault.<sup>203</sup>

<sup>196</sup> UN Library, [UNSC meetings and outcomes tables: Vetoes](#)

<sup>197</sup> See next paragraph for sources on these debates

<sup>198</sup> UN, [Deadlock deepens as Security Council rejects competing resolutions \[...\]](#), 25 October 2023

<sup>199</sup> [UN written record S/PV.9439](#), 16 October 2023, pp2,5; FCDO, [We cannot support a resolution which fails to condemn Hamas’ terror attacks](#), 17 October 2023

<sup>200</sup> [UN written record S/PV.9442](#), 18 October 2023, pp3, 8-9 FCDO, [The UK supports Israel’s right to self-defence in line with the UN charter](#), 18 October 2023

<sup>201</sup> [UN written record S/PV.9453](#), 25 October 2023, pp6-7; FCDO, [We regret the draft resolution by the US has not been adopted](#), 25 October 2023

<sup>202</sup> [UN written record S/PV.9453](#), 25 October 2023, p4; FCDO, [We regret the draft resolution by the US has not been adopted](#), 25 October 2023

<sup>203</sup> [UN written record S/PV.9499](#); 8 December 2023, pp3,4; FCDO, [We call for further and longer pauses](#), 8 December 2023

## UN General Assembly

At the General Assembly, the UK has abstained on both resolutions which have passed (for their text, see page 38). In both cases, the UK Government said the resolution should have condemned Hamas.

## 4.4

## International Court of Justice (ICJ), 2023/24

In December 2023, South Africa began proceedings against Israel at the ICJ alleging Israel is breaching its obligations under the Genocide Convention.<sup>204</sup> The full case will likely last several years. On 26 January the ICJ issued provisional (emergency) measures requested by South Africa. The ICJ was not deciding on if there are any Convention breaches (this will occur later).<sup>205</sup>

The ICJ said Gaza's humanitarian situation is at "serious risk of deteriorating further" before it can render its final judgement. It did not impose a ceasefire or call for a suspension of military operations, as requested by South Africa.<sup>206</sup> Instead, the court ordered Israel to:

- abide by its obligations under the Genocide Convention and take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of genocidal acts.
- ensure its military does not commit any genocidal acts.
- take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance for Palestinians in Gaza.
- prevent the destruction and preserve evidence relating to allegations of genocide in this case.
- submit a report on measures taken to comply with the ICJ in a month.

Following the January order, Israel's representative to the UN said the case "distort[ed] the law and the unique force of the Genocide Convention". The Palestinian representative said the decision should bring an end to the conflict. South Africa's representative argued the decision meant there was no credible basis for Israel to claim its military action was complying with international law and support for Israel's military operations should end.<sup>207</sup>

On 12 February, South Africa sought additional measures in response to Israel's actions in Rafah. To date, the ICJ has not responded to the request.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> ICJ, [Case Overview 192 South Africa v. Israel](#)

<sup>205</sup> ICJ, Case 192, South Africa v Israel, [26 January 2024 Order \(provisional measures\)](#), incl. para 62

<sup>206</sup> This section and provisional measures from above, paras 72, 77-82

<sup>207</sup> UN, [Humanitarian response in Gaza 'completely dependent on Palestinian refugee agency'](#), 31 January 2024

<sup>208</sup> South Africa, [Urgent Request for additional measures \[...\] \(PDF\)](#) 12 February 2024, paras 2, 7



## Further reading on international law and the ICJ

- International Red Cross, [What is international humanitarian law?](#), April 2022
- Just Security, [Law of armed conflict in the Israel-Hamas war](#), October 2023
- The Economist, [Is Israel acting within the laws of war?](#), October 2023
- EJIL: Talk!, [Implications of the ICJ order \[...\] for 3<sup>rd</sup> states](#), February 2024
- Chatham House, [South Africa's genocide case against Israel](#), January 2024
- Just Security, [Top experts' views of ICJ ruling](#), January 2024
- Opinio Juris, [The ICJ's provisional measures order](#), January 2024

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## 5 Response of G7, United States and European Union

### 5.1 G7 leaders and foreign ministers

The G7 is constituted of Canada, France, Italy, Germany, Japan, the United States, and United Kingdom, together with the European Union. The group has issued four joint statements on the conflict since November.<sup>209</sup>

In its most recent statement of 17 February, G7 foreign ministers:

- Condemned the terror attacks by Hamas on 7 October and continuing attacks against Israel.
- Emphasised Israel’s right to defend itself in accordance with international law.
- Called for the release of hostages held by Hamas without preconditions.
- Expressed their intention to work for “prolonged and durable pauses” in the fighting to lead to a “sustainable ceasefire” and for more humanitarian aid corridors, in line with the UN Security Council resolutions passed in 2023 (see above).
- Said “the rise in extremist settler violence” is “unjustifiable and threatens prospects for a lasting peace” and that those who have committed crimes “must be held to account”.
- Urged restraint between Hezbollah and Israel on the Lebanese border.
- Condemned actions by the Houthis in the Red Sea and said Iran’s provision of arms and related materiel to the Houthis and other armed groups “has dangerously increased tensions”.
- Said they remained committed to a two-state solution.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> FCDO, [G7 foreign ministers’ meeting](#), 8 November 2023; FCDO, [Israel and Gaza: G7 foreign ministers’ statement](#), 28 November 2023; PMO, [G7 Leaders’ statement](#), 6 December 2023

<sup>210</sup> Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Statement by Antonio Tajani, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy in his capacity as Chair](#) (PDF), 17 February 2024

## 5.2

# United States

## Statements

### Nature of Israeli operations and position on a ceasefire

President Joe Biden has condemned the actions of Hamas as “pure, unadulterated evil” and said the United States would “stand with Israel”.<sup>211</sup>

While describing the Hamas attack as “like 15 9/11s” for Israel (a reference to the September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center), Mr Biden “cautioned” Israel to avoid the “mistakes” he said the US made after 9/11. He said Israel’s actions should be “deliberate” and follow “an honest assessment about whether the path you are on will achieve” the desired objectives.<sup>212</sup>

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said that Israel should “tak[e] every possible precaution to avoid harming civilians”.<sup>213</sup> Following the resumption of fighting on 1 December, he said:

it remains imperative that Israel put a premium on civilian protection. And there does remain a gap [...] between the intent to protect civilians and the actual results that we’re seeing on the ground.<sup>214</sup>

President Biden has said a ceasefire will only be considered once Hamas has released all hostages.<sup>215</sup> Secretary of State Blinken has argued that:

[...] those calling for an immediate ceasefire have an obligation to explain how to address the unacceptable result it would likely bring about: Hamas left in place, with more than 200 hostages, with the capacity and stated intent to repeat October 7th – again and again and again.<sup>216</sup>

On 8 February, Mr Biden said Israel’s conduct in Gaza had been “over the top” and that “innocent people [are] in trouble and dying [...] it’s got to stop”.<sup>217</sup>

### Request to Congress for funding

The Biden Administration has requested an additional US\$14.3 billion from Congress to support Israel: US\$10.6 billion for air and missile defence support and US\$3.7 billion for embassy support and foreign military financing. Funds for additional humanitarian assistance have also been requested.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> White House, [Remarks by President Biden on the terrorist attacks in Israel](#), 10 October 2023

<sup>212</sup> White House, [Remarks by President Biden on the October 7<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks](#), 18 October 2023

<sup>213</sup> US Department of State (DoS), [Secretary Antony J Blinken remarks to the press](#), 15 October 2023

<sup>214</sup> US DoS, [Secretary Antony J Blinken and UK Foreign Secretary \[...\]](#), 7 December 2023

<sup>215</sup> [Biden says “we can talk” about Israel-Hamas ceasefire after hostages are released](#), The Hill, 10 October 2023

<sup>216</sup> US DoS, [Secretary Antony J Blinken at a press availability](#), 8 November 2023

<sup>217</sup> [Biden calls Israel’s response in Gaza over the top](#), CNN, 8 February 2024

<sup>218</sup> [What’s in Biden’s \\$106 billion supplemental funding request](#), Reuters, 20 October 2023

However, the requested funds are currently subject to negotiation with Congressional Republicans who are seeking action on US border security.<sup>219</sup> The President has used emergency powers to provide some munitions.<sup>220</sup>

### Statements on the future of Gaza

Speaking on 2 December 2023, Vice President Kamala Harris said the United States would not support Hamas retaining control of Gaza or Israeli occupation of Gaza. Instead, she said Gaza should be unified with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority:

Five principles guide our approach for post-conflict Gaza: no forcible displacement, no reoccupation, no siege or blockade, no reduction in territory, and no use of Gaza as a platform for terrorism.

The international community must dedicate significant resources to support short- and long-term recovery in Gaza [...]

The Palestinian Authority Security Forces must be strengthened to eventually assume security responsibilities in Gaza. Until then, there must be security arrangements that are acceptable to Israel, the people of Gaza, the Palestinian Authority, and the international partners. And to reiterate — and this is very important — terrorists will not be permitted to continue to threaten Israel. [...]

The Palestinian Authority must be revitalized [...] this revitalized [Authority] must have the capacity to govern Gaza, as well as the West Bank [...]

A two-state solution, [...] remains the best path, we believe, toward a durable peace. The President and I are committed to that goal. [...]

When this conflict ends, Hamas cannot control Gaza, and Israel must be secure. Palestinians need a hopeful political horizon, economic opportunity, and freedom [...].<sup>221</sup>

In January 2024, the State Department condemned statements by two Israeli ministers advocating the resettlement of Palestinians outside of Gaza as “inflammatory and irresponsible”. The department reiterated its position that Gaza “is Palestinian land and will remain Palestinian land” after the conflict (though without Hamas in control).<sup>222</sup>

The US is also supportive of renewing negotiations on a two-state solution and advancing Israeli-Saudi talks on normalising diplomatic relations. Saudi officials have said this will only occur if there is recognition of an independent

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<sup>219</sup> [White House to intensify push for Ukraine aid and border security deal](#), Reuters, 10 November 2023

<sup>220</sup> [Biden admin uses emergency authority to approve tank shells sale](#), The Hill, 12 December 2023

<sup>221</sup> White House, [Remarks by Vice President Harris on the conflict \[...\]](#), 2 December 2023

<sup>222</sup> US DoS, [Rejection of irresponsible statements on resettlement of Palestinians \[...\]](#), 2 January 2024

Palestinian state and Israel military operations end. The US is reportedly reviewing options as to when to recognise a Palestinian state.<sup>223</sup>

## New US sanctions

There have been multiple rounds of US sanctions against Hamas and other Iran-aligned groups, such as Hezbollah, announced since 7 October:

- financial facilitators of Hamas in Qatar, Turkey, Lebanon and Algeria.
- members of [Palestinian Islamic Jihad](#) and [Iranian Bonyad Shahid](#).
- Iraqi militia group [Kataib Hezbollah](#), in response to attacks on US forces.
- Iraqi airline Fly Baghdad and Al-Huda Bank, which the United States says funds the IRGC and Iran-aligned militias.
- members of a procurement network for Iranian ballistic missile and unnamed aerial vehicle (UAVs, or drone) programmes.
- funders of Hezbollah in Syria.<sup>224</sup>

## US military assistance and deployments

The US has deployed military assets to deter against regional escalation by Iran-aligned groups, in support of troops already in the region, and to provide military assistance to Israel. It is also leading an international maritime coalition and air and naval strikes to secure trade in the Red Sea (see the [Library briefing on the Houthis and the Red Sea](#)). Other actions include:

- Deploying two aircraft carriers and warships to the Mediterranean (one was withdrawn in January 2024).<sup>225</sup> The US has deployed a submarine.<sup>226</sup>
- Placing 2,000 US troops on a “heightened state of readiness” to respond to any deterioration in the security environment in the Middle East.<sup>227</sup>
- Deploying F-16 aircraft to support US defence in the region.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> [Biden: Two state solution still possible with Netanyahu in power](#), Politico, 19 January 2024; [No diplomatic ties with Israel without independent Palestinian state](#), AA, 7 February 2024; [State department reviewing options for possible recognition of Palestinian state](#), Axios, 1 February 2024

<sup>224</sup> US DoS, [Designating individuals and entities \[...\]](#), 27 October 2023; US Department of the Treasury (DoT), [Treasury sanctions Hamas operatives \[...\]](#), 18 October 2023; [US and UK target additional Hamas finance officials and representatives](#), 13 December 2023; [Treasury sanctions transitional procurement network](#), 2 February 2024; US DoS, [Designating supporters of Iran’s malign agenda](#), 22 January 2024; [Taking financial measures against Iraqi bank and designating its owner](#), 29 January 2024; [Designating IRGC-QF and Hezbollah financial facilitators](#), 31 January 2024;

<sup>225</sup> [US navy’s largest aircraft carrier returning to US \[...\]](#), CNN, 2 January 2024

<sup>226</sup> US DoD, [US has four objectives in the Middle East](#), 6 November 2023

<sup>227</sup> US DoD, [Statement from Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh \[...\]](#), 17 October 2023

<sup>228</sup> US DoD, [F-16s head to Middle East to help protect US troops](#), 24 October 2023

- Sending additional missile defences to Israel.<sup>229</sup>
- Sending military advisers to Israel to aid its military response.<sup>230</sup>

## US humanitarian assistance

The US has announced US\$121 million in humanitarian assistance for Gaza and the West Bank to support over one million people affected by conflict. It will be provided through “trusted partners” such as UN agencies.<sup>231</sup>

## Visa restrictions for involvement in West Bank violence

In December, the US State Department announced it would introduce a policy of visa restrictions targeting individuals committing acts of violence or restricting civilian access to essential services and goods in the West Bank.<sup>232</sup>

The Department said it condemned “attacks by violent Israeli extremists against Palestinians, and those by violent Palestinians extremists against Israelis” and expected “dozens” of individuals and their families to be subject to the restrictions.<sup>233</sup> To February 2024, it has designated four Israelis.<sup>234</sup>

### Further reading on the position of the United States

- Chatham House, [President Biden’s Middle East visit reveals the challenges for US diplomacy](#), 18 October 2023
- Middle East Institute, [America faces brewing crisis of confidence among key Middle East partners](#), 13 November 2023
- Atlantic Council, [The post-7 October US strategy in the Middle East is coming into focus](#), 21 November 2023
- [The war that remade the Middle East: How Washington can stabilise a transformed region](#), Foreign Affairs, 20 November 2023
- [Washington’s looming Middle Eastern quagmire](#), Foreign Affairs, 24 November 2023
- [In dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, America has no easy way out](#), Foreign Affairs, 22 December 2023

<sup>229</sup> [US to send two Iron dome batteries to Israel](#), The Hill, 25 October 2023

<sup>230</sup> [Pentagon rushes defenses and advisers to Middle East \[...\]](#), AP, 24 October 2023

<sup>231</sup> White House, [US announcement of humanitarian assistance \[...\]](#), 18 October 2023; USAID, [The US announces additional humanitarian assistance for Palestinian people](#), 3 December 2023

<sup>232</sup> US DoS, [Announcement of visa restriction policy \[...\]](#), 5 December 2023

<sup>233</sup> US DoS, [Press briefing](#), 5 December 2023

<sup>234</sup> US DoS, [Further measures to promote peace, security and stability in the West Bank](#), 1 February 2024

- Congressional Research Service, [Israel and Hamas conflict in brief: US policy and options for Congress](#) (PDF), updated 6 February 2024

## 5.3

### European Union

#### Statements on the Israel-Hamas conflict

EU High Representative Josep Borrell has criticised the Hamas offensive and condemned attacks on civilians and terrorist actions.<sup>235</sup> In December, he backed the call of the UN Secretary General for a humanitarian ceasefire.<sup>236</sup>

Mr Borrell has argued EU states should increase their cooperation with Arab states to “make peace between Arab countries and Israel” and that any negotiations should involve the Palestinians (though not Hamas), arguing that without that “the cycle of violence will restart again”.

A summit of EU leaders was held on 17 October, in which they condemned the Hamas terrorist attacks and said Israel had the right to defend itself in line with international law.<sup>237</sup> A further summit took place on 26 October. A call for “pauses [in fighting] for humanitarian need” was among the conclusions.<sup>238</sup>

There has been continuing division in the EU, however. In December, the leaders of Malta, Spain, Ireland, and Belgium unsuccessfully requested the next EU summit call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.<sup>239</sup>

#### Humanitarian assistance

On 9 October 2023 the EU said it would review its aid to the Palestinian Authority to ensure no funding reaches terrorist groups. In November, the review concluded that no EU aid funds were being accessed by Hamas.<sup>240</sup>

The EU has pledged a total of €103 million in humanitarian aid for Gaza in 2023. In 2024, it is planning €125 million across Gaza and the West Bank.<sup>241</sup>

The EU has also established a humanitarian air bridge to fly essential aid to Egypt to deliver to humanitarian organisations in Gaza,<sup>242</sup> and said it was

<sup>235</sup> This and next paragraph from EU External Action, [Press remarks by Joseph Borrell](#), 10 October 2023

<sup>236</sup> [Borrell backs UN call for humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza](#), Politico, 7 December 2023

<sup>237</sup> European Council, [Video conference of the members of the European Council](#), 17 October 2023

<sup>238</sup> European Council, [Council conclusions, 26 and 27 October 2023](#), para 16

<sup>239</sup> [Spain, Ireland, Belgium, Malta want EU summit to call for \[...\] ceasefire](#), Reuters, 9 December 2023

<sup>240</sup> [EU to continue aid to Palestinian after review \[...\]](#), Politico, 21 November 2023

<sup>241</sup> [EU announces 125 million in initial humanitarian aid for Palestinians for 2024](#), 8 December 2023

<sup>242</sup> European Commission, [EU launches Humanitarian Air Bridge operation \[...\]](#), 16 October 2023

exploring the potential for a maritime corridor from Cyprus to deliver aid.<sup>243</sup> Israel's Government agreed to a maritime route in December 2023.

Individual EU member states have also announced humanitarian assistance. For example, France is deploying a naval ship to support Gaza hospitals and states its total aid to the Occupied Palestinian Territories will be €110 million in 2023.<sup>244</sup> Germany has committed €179 million for 2023.<sup>245</sup>

## Sanctions and visas restrictions

The European Union first added Hamas to its list of designated terrorist organisations in 2003 (though this was subject to challenges in EU courts and the group was most recently re-designated in 2021).<sup>246</sup> This means the group is subject to freezing of funds and other financial assets and that no funds or economic resources can be made available to them.<sup>247</sup>

In January, the EU introduced a new sanctions regime allowing it to target individuals who materially or financially support Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad. It has introduced sanctions against seven individuals.<sup>248</sup>

From December, the EU has been discussing sanctions, including travel bans, against those involved in West Bank violence. These are ongoing.<sup>249</sup> On 13 February, Germany, France, and Poland announced that Israeli settlers involved attacks would be sanctioned.<sup>250</sup>

## Statements on a two-state solution

The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Joseph Borrell, has argued a "Palestinian state is the best security for Israel" and that Arab-Israeli cooperation "hinges upon" it.<sup>251</sup>

### The European Union and the Israel-Hamas conflict

- Italian Institute for International Political Studies, [Europeans, Israel and Palestine](#), 6 November 2023

<sup>243</sup> European Commission, [Speech by President von der Leyen \[...\]](#), 9 November 2023

<sup>244</sup> Permanent Mission of France to the UN, [Statement by Ms Catherine Colonna](#), 24 October 2023 and [Macron: France to send navy ship to support Gaza hospitals](#), Politico, 25 October 2023

<sup>245</sup> Federal Foreign Office, [Food and medicine for Gaza](#), 8 December 2023

<sup>246</sup> [Common Council Position 2003/651/CFSP of 12 September 2003; Top EU court returns Hamas to terror list after 3-year break](#), Courthouse News Service, 23 November 2021

<sup>247</sup> European Council, [EU terrorist list: List of persons, groups and entities subject to specific measures](#)

<sup>248</sup> European Council, [EU terror list: Council lists one individual in response to the 7 October attacks in Israel](#), 16 January 2024; [Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad: Council establishes dedicated sanctions framework](#), 19 January 2024

<sup>249</sup> [EU to propose sanctions on violent Israeli settlers in West Bank](#), Reuters, 11 December 2023

<sup>250</sup> [France bans 28 Israeli settlers over West Bank violence](#), BBC News, 13 February 2024

<sup>251</sup> Delegation of the EU, [Why a Palestinian state is the best security guarantee](#), 28 November 2023



- Middle East Institute, [The EU and the Israel-Hamas war: A narrow but important niche](#), 14 November 2023
- European Council on Foreign Relations, [Recognising Palestine: How Europeans can support a Gaza war political track](#), 4 February 2024

## 6 Response in the wider Middle East

### 6.1 Violence in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon

#### Role of Iran

Iran has a history of providing military, financial and political support to armed groups in the Middle East, including Hamas, Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis in Yemen.<sup>252</sup> Iran's support is interpreted as a "forward defence" strategy, in which it can threaten Israel and fight its opponents, such as the US and Saudi Arabia, outside of Iran.<sup>253</sup>

Iran backed the 7 October assault by Hamas. President Ebrahim Raisi blamed Israel and its partners for "endangering the security of the regional states" and said the Hamas assault would end the "harassment of Palestinian women and prisoners" and the "constant desecration of Al-Aqsa Mosque".<sup>254</sup>

However, speaking in October 2023, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said there was "nothing" to suggest Iran was "directly involved in this attack [by Hamas against Israel], in planning it or in carrying it out".<sup>255</sup>

Speaking on 13 December, the UK Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, said the UK Government judges that "Iran doesn't want a direct war" but "is comfortable with the way events have unfolded".<sup>256</sup>

#### Hezbollah-Israel conflict

Hezbollah is a Shia military and political group, which emerged in the 1980s during Lebanon's civil war. Hezbollah plays a substantial role in Lebanese politics. It is a proscribed terrorist group by the UK Government.<sup>257</sup>

On 8 October 2023, Hezbollah launched missiles and conducted artillery attacks on some military sites in northern Israel "in solidarity" with Hamas.<sup>258</sup> In December, the UN Deputy Secretary General reported "daily" exchanges of fire between Israel and Hezbollah, and warned that "increasingly, there have

<sup>252</sup> Commons Library, [Iran's influence in the Middle East](#), section 1

<sup>253</sup> Middle East Institute, [Upgrading Iran's military doctrine](#), 10 December 2019

<sup>254</sup> [Iranian president: Israel responsible for regional instability](#), Fars News Agency, 8 October 2023

<sup>255</sup> US DoS, [Secretary Antony J Blinken with Kristen Welker](#), 8 October 2023

<sup>256</sup> Ministry of Defence, [Chief of the Defence staff lecture 2023](#), 13 December 2023

<sup>257</sup> Home Office, [Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations](#), 15 September 2023, 'Hizballah'.

<sup>258</sup> [Hezbollah tells Palestinian militants "our guns and rockets are with you."](#) Al-Arabiya News, 8 October 2023

been strikes on civilian areas” in both Israel and Lebanon.<sup>259</sup> Around 87,000 Lebanese have been displaced and 96,000 Israelis evacuated (as of February 2024).<sup>260</sup>

Israel’s Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, says Israel will work diplomatically or militarily to restore calm in northern Israel.<sup>261</sup> In 2023/24, diplomatic efforts have centred on implementing [UN Security Council Resolution 1701 \(2006\)](#).<sup>262</sup>

The Washington Post says US intelligence assesses that Israel would struggle to conduct operations in two theatres, given [Hezbollah’s strong military](#).<sup>263</sup>

The 2006 resolution followed Israeli troops entering Lebanon in response to an attack by Hezbollah earlier in the year.<sup>264</sup> It called for the end of hostilities, the withdrawal of Israeli forces, the disarmament of Hezbollah, and for the [UN Interim Force in Lebanon \(UNIFIL\)](#) to deploy to the “Blue Line” to maintain peace.<sup>265</sup> The resolution has never been fully implemented (Hezbollah retains its arms and no demilitarised zone in southern Lebanon was established).

## Attacks on US forces in Syria, Iraq and Jordan

The US has around 900 military personnel in Syria and 2,500 in Iraq, focused on combating Islamic State/Daesh. In 2024, the UN estimated there were between 3,000 and 5,000 Islamic State fighters across the two countries.<sup>266</sup>

As set out by the Washington Institute, [Anti-US strikes in Iraq and Syria during the Gaza crisis](#), groups including Islamic Resistance in Iraq and other [pro-Iran militia groups](#) have been conducting attacks on US forces since 7 October. The US says Iran is “actively facilitating” some of the attacks.<sup>267</sup>

The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) estimates more than 200 attacks have been launched against US troops and bases (including in the Red Sea) since 7 October.<sup>268</sup> These have resulted in 168 American casualties, including three deaths in action.<sup>269</sup> On 5 February the UK Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps, said a third of the 160 attacks in Syria and Iraq had

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<sup>259</sup> UN, [“The risk of regional spillover” of conflict in Middle East remains high \[...\]](#), 29 December 2023

<sup>260</sup> UNOCHA, [Flash update 11: Escalation of hostilities in southern Lebanon](#), 12 February 2024; [IDF troops adopt a rare defensive posture](#), Times of Israel, 13 January 2024

<sup>261</sup> [Gallant warns Hezbollah \[...\]](#), Times of Israel, 3 February 2024

<sup>262</sup> [Efforts intensify to bring calm to Lebanon-Israel border](#), AP, 7 February 2023; PQ 9203 [[Lebanon: Children and civilians](#)], 17 January 2024

<sup>263</sup> [Israel’s talk of expanding war to Lebanon expands US](#), Washington Post, 7 January 2024

<sup>264</sup> For a historic introduction, see Commons Library research briefing, [The crisis in Lebanon](#), 2007.

<sup>265</sup> [UN Security Council Resolution 1701 \(2006\)](#)

<sup>266</sup> UN, [18<sup>th</sup> report of the Secretary General on Islamic State/Daesh](#), 31 January 2024, para 33; [Why US troops are in the Middle East](#), Reuters, 3 February 2024

<sup>267</sup> [White House says Iran “actively facilitating” some attacks \[...\]](#), Reuters, 24 October 2023

<sup>268</sup> ACLED, [US strikes and counter strikes in the Middle East](#), updated 4 February 2024

<sup>269</sup> [US conduct strikes in Iraq on Kataib Hezbollah](#), CNN, 7 February 2023

“involved British troops as well”.<sup>270</sup> US-backed Kurdish forces in Syria have also been attacked by Iran-aligned groups.<sup>271</sup>

In response, the US has conducted “self-defence strikes” since October, which it says are “intended to solely protect and defend US personnel”.<sup>272</sup>

Following the killing of three US troops at Tower 22 base in Jordan by [Ketaib Hezbollah in Iraq](#), on 3 February the US struck 85 targets at seven facilities against Iran-aligned groups in Syria and Iraq.<sup>273</sup> The US said it will also take “further action”.<sup>274</sup> The UK Government said it “fully support[ed] the US right to self-defence and their right to respond”.<sup>275</sup> UN Special Representative for Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, called for restraint by all sides.<sup>276</sup>

The conflict between Iran-aligned groups and US troops has put pressure on the US position in Iraq. Following a 4 January US drone strike in Baghdad that killed the commander of an Iran-aligned militia, the Iraqi Government said it would begin talks with the US on the withdrawal of its forces (though this is not the first time that withdrawal has been proposed).<sup>277</sup> Talks are ongoing.

## Further reading on the risks of regional escalation

- Washington Institute, [Reinforcing US diplomacy to stop a Hezbollah-Israel war](#), February 2024
- Washington Institute, [Two tough scenarios for US-Iraq relations](#), February 2024
- Crisis Group, [Why the war in Gaza makes a nuclear Iran more likely](#), January 2024
- Center for Strategic and International Studies, [Can a regional war be avoided in the Middle East?](#), January 2024
- Carnegie Middle East Center, [Why a Lebanon war is not imminent](#), January 2024
- Brookings Institute, [How Iraq is managing the Israel-Gaza crisis](#), December 2023
- US Institute for Peace, [Proxy attacks](#), December 2023
- Foreign Policy, [The 7 reasons why Iran won't fight for Hamas](#), December 2023

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<sup>270</sup> HC Deb, [5 February 2024](#), c28

<sup>271</sup> [Six Kurdish fighters killed in Iran-linked attack on Syria base](#), Al-Monitor, 5 February 2024

<sup>272</sup> DoD, [Secretary of Defense Lloyd J Austin III's statement on US military strikes](#), 26 October 2023

<sup>273</sup> [What we know about US retaliator strikes](#), BBC News, 3 February 2024

<sup>274</sup> USIP, [US on strikes in Syria and Iraq](#), 5 February 2024

<sup>275</sup> FCDO, [We condemn the multiple attacks by Iran-aligned groups \[...\]](#), 5 February 2024

<sup>276</sup> UN, [UN envoy appeals for restraint](#), 6 February 2024

<sup>277</sup> [Will Iraq finally push US troops out because of Gaza?](#), DW, 10 January 2024

- Arab Center DC,  [Hamas’s “Al-Aqsa flood” challenges Iran’s axis of resistance](#), November 2023
- Chatham House,  [The closer Israel gets to destroying Hamas, the more likely war with Hezbollah becomes](#), November 2023
- International Crisis Group,  [Understanding the risks of US-Iran escalation amid the Gaza conflict](#), November 2023

## 6.2

### Arab League and Organization for Islamic Cooperation

The [Arab League](#) is an alliance of Arab states across the Middle East and North Africa. It seeks to support collaboration among its members.<sup>278</sup>

On 11 October 2023 the League issued a statement calling on Israel to resume talks with the Palestinian Authority on securing a two-state solution to the conflict.<sup>279</sup> The League’s Secretary General, Ahmed Abul Gheit, also called for an immediate ceasefire, condemned attacks on civilians and criticised Israel’s actions in Gaza as “collective punishment” prohibited by international law.<sup>280</sup>

A joint meeting between the League and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was held on 11 November 2023. The OIC has 57 member-states, and says it aims to be “collective voice of the Muslim world”.<sup>281</sup>

The resulting joint statement called for an end to the conflict, the delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza, and for the International Criminal Court to investigate Israel for “violations” in Gaza.<sup>282</sup>

## 6.3

### Middle Eastern states

The US says that in addition to Iran, Hamas “raises funds in Persian Gulf countries” and from Palestinians abroad.<sup>283</sup> Since the beginning of the conflict, the US has imposed sanctions on financial facilitators of Hamas, which included a “Qatar-based” individual and individuals in Turkey and Algeria.<sup>284</sup>

<sup>278</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, [Arab League](#), updated 25 May 2023

<sup>279</sup> [Arab ministers urge Israel to resume talks on two-state solution](#), The Guardian, 11 October 2023

<sup>280</sup> [Arab League chief calls for immediate ceasefire in Gaza](#), BBC Monitoring, 11 October 2023

<sup>281</sup> OIC, [About](#)

<sup>282</sup> [Arab-Islamic summit calls for end to Gaza war](#), BBC Monitoring, 11 November 2023

<sup>283</sup> US DoS, [Country reports on terrorism 2021](#), February 2023

<sup>284</sup> US Department of the Treasury, [Treasury sanctions Hamas operatives \[...\]](#), 18 October 2023

## Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members

The GCC is Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

- The Secretary General of the GCC, Jassem Albudaiwi, has called for an immediate ceasefire and cited the “Israeli occupation forces” and “flagrant Israeli attacks against the Palestinian people and holy sites” as “responsible for the current situation”.<sup>285</sup>
- The UAE signed the Abraham Accords with Israel in 2020. It has described the Hamas attack as “a serious and grave escalation” and called on both parties to de-escalate.<sup>286</sup> Its President, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, was the first Arab leader to speak to Mr Netanyahu since the Hamas attack.<sup>287</sup>
- Bahrain, which also signed the Accords with Israel in 2020, says its ambassador has returned from Israel. Israel’s foreign ministry says “relations between Israel and Bahrain are stable”.<sup>288</sup>
- Saudi Arabia, which had been in talks with Israel during 2023 to normalise its diplomatic relations, has called for an “immediate halt” to the conflict.<sup>289</sup> In 2024, there have been media reports that the Biden Administration is seeking to use a potential Saudi-Israel agreement as part of a pathway to Palestinian statehood. Saudi officials have stated any agreement with Israel would be conditional on an “irrevocable” pathway toward a Palestinian state.<sup>290</sup>
- Qatar: Qatar has hosted some of the Hamas leadership.<sup>291</sup> Its government has denied allegations it funds Hamas and says any Qatari aid to Gaza is coordinated with Israel, the UN, and US.<sup>292</sup>

Qatar has defended Hamas’s presence as a means of “keep[ing] communication open [...] [and] putting an end [to] this conflict”.<sup>293</sup> The US has said Qatar has engaged effectively on negotiations with Hamas. However, the US has also told the Qatari Government there can be “no more business as usual with Hamas” following the events of 7 October 2023. There are reports Qatar is open to reconsidering the presence of Hamas in the country.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> [Saudi Arabia joins global calls for de-escalation \[...\]](#), Arab News, 7 October 2023

<sup>286</sup> UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [UAE calls for protection of civilians \[...\]](#), 8 October 2023

<sup>287</sup> [Netanyahu speaks with UAE president in first call with Arab leader \[...\]](#), Al-Monitor, 16 October 2023

<sup>288</sup> [Bahrain seeks to balance anger over Gaza with ties to Israel, US](#), Reuters, 24 November 2023

<sup>289</sup> [Saudi Arabia joins global calls for de-escalation of conflict \[...\]](#), Arab News, 7 October 2023

<sup>290</sup> [Blinken tells Bibi Saudis want peace deal, \[...\]](#), Axios, 10 January 2024

<sup>291</sup> [Ismail Haniya re-elected as leader of Palestinian group Hamas](#), Al-Jazeera, 1 August 2021

<sup>292</sup> [Qatar, Iran, Turkey and beyond: Hamas’s network of allies](#), France 24, 16 October 2023

<sup>293</sup> US DoS, [Secretary Antony J Blinken with Qatari Prime Minister \[...\]](#), 13 October 2023

<sup>294</sup> [Qatar open to reconsidering Hamas presence in Qatar, US official says](#), Reuters, 27 October 2023; US DoS, [Press briefing](#), 26 October 2023

## Further reading on the Gulf, Israel-Hamas, and Gaza

- Chatham House, [Gulf states have the power to revive a two-state solution](#), 2 February 2024
- Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, [Inner logic and outer logic on post-Gaza normalisation](#), 1 February 2024
- European Council on Foreign Relations, [The Gulf states' view on Gaza and the Red Sea](#), 12 January 2024
- RUSI, [The Gulf and Gaza: Staying the course amid renewed crisis](#), 11 December 2023
- Politico, [The last days of Hamas' office in Qatar?](#), 11 October 2023

## Other states

- Egypt: President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has said the Egyptian Government has made “intensive contact” with all parties to the conflict and said any talks should “tackle the [conflict’s] root causes”.<sup>295</sup>
- Turkey: Like Qatar, Turkey has hosted Hamas leaders, and has sought to negotiate between Fatah and Hamas in the past to construct a coalition government for the Palestinian Authority.<sup>296</sup> In October 2023, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan described Hamas as a “patriotic liberation movement”.<sup>297</sup> Israel and Turkey have recalled their diplomats.<sup>298</sup>

## Further reading on the Middle East and the conflict

- US Institute for Peace, [Six dilemmas facing Egypt](#), 18 January 2024
- Atlantic Council, [Can Turkey help resolve the Israel-Hamas war?](#), 9 January 2024
- European Council on Foreign Relations, [The risks of Palestinian displacement for Egypt](#), 14 December 2023
- International Crisis Group, [The Gaza war reverberates across the Middle East](#), 4 November 2023

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<sup>295</sup> Egypt State Information Service, [Sisi urges tackling root causes of Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#), 9 October 2023

<sup>296</sup> [Ismail Haniya re-elected as leader of Palestinian group Hamas](#), Al-Jazeera, 1 August 2021

<sup>297</sup> [Turkey's Erdogan hails Hamas as liberators. \[...\]](#), Al-Monitor, 25 October 2023

<sup>298</sup> [Israel recalls diplomats from Turkey after Erdogan's 'grave' statements](#), Al-Monitor, 28 October 2023; [Turkey recalls ambassador to Israel ahead of Blinken's visit](#), Al-Monitor, 4 November 2023

- Middle East Institute, [Assessing the resilience of Israel's regional ties, one month on](#), 6 November 2023
- [Qatar, Iran, Turkey and beyond: Hamas's network of allies](#), France 24, 14 October 2023




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