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Al Aqsa Flood

British government response to *Al Aqsa Flood* operation reaffirms ironclad defence of Israel and ratchets up domestic repression against Palestine solidarity ever further

Britain's foreign policy stance

- The British government's response to the *Al Aqsa Flood* operation on the 7th of October and Israel's indiscriminate assault thereafter has largely followed the template of other Western powers: namely, a blank cheque for Israeli exterminationism in Gaza, and running cover in international forums.
- The day after the operation, on the 8th of October, Rishi Sunak spoke to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [and offered](#) 'any support Israel needs', and the [next day elucidated](#) that this would extend to diplomatic, intelligence, security and/or military support for Israel, if requested.

Thus far Britain has also [deployed military assets in the Eastern Mediterranean](#) as a guarantor of 'regional stability', and called for its military teams in Israel, Cyprus and the region to bolster themselves for regional spillover.

- As Israel's destruction of Gaza has continued apace, Britain has remained firm in its defence of Israel, couching this in terms of Israel's 'right to defend itself', and only belatedly [caveating this full-throated support with a reference to international law](#) standards.

Sunak has not called for a ceasefire, arguing that this ['would only benefit Hamas'](#), instead opting for the US government position of temporary 'humanitarian pauses'.

The Labour Party has followed in lockstep, with leader Keir Starmer affirming on radio that ["Israel has the right" to withhold power and water from Palestinian civilians](#), while [refusing to call for a ceasefire](#) in favour of 'humanitarian pauses'.

- Complementing the US' role as a sponsor and accomplice to Israel's assault, the UK has sought to exert its influence through a diplomatic offensive with the Western-aligned states of the region, in attempting to prevent a potential escalation of the war which would draw in Iran and Hezbollah, alongside other regional states.
- This began with a visit to Downing Street on 15th October by long-term British ally King Abdullah II of Jordan, who was undertaking a diplomatic tour of his own [across Europe to push for de-escalation](#).

Following the Al-Ahli hospital bombing on 17th October, Jordan was forced to take a harder line, [cancelling a summit with US President Biden](#), and hampering Britain's attempts to use it as an intermediary with regional states.

- In the days following Abdullah's visit, Sunak hosted calls with regional allies including [Mahmoud Abbas](#) of the Palestinian Authority, President [Erdogan](#) of Turkey, Sheikh [Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani](#) of Qatar, and [Mohammed bin Salman](#) of Saudi Arabia.
- After the mass popular outrage in the region following Israel's bombing of the Al-Ahli hospital, Sunak embarked on [a 'lobbying tour'](#) of the Middle East to appeal directly to Egypt, [Qatar](#) and [Saudi Arabia](#) to help prevent an escalation.

This also included a [joint press conference](#) with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu during which Sunak reiterated Britain's effectively unqualified support for the Israeli operation, stating that it had both a ["right" and a "duty" to go after Hamas](#).

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- The UN Security Council has at time of writing been unable to adopt a unified position on the war, as US-led resolutions have remained indefatigably in support of Israel's attacks, which have been opposed by the Russian and Chinese representatives - both holding vetoes in the Council.

The UK's position as a fellow veto-holding member of the Security Council has fallen entirely in line with that of the US.

- The UK voted **against** a Russian-proposed resolution on the 16th of October for ['failing to condemn Hamas'](#), **abstained** from a compromise resolution drafted by Brazil on the 18th for not being ['clearer on Israel's inherent right to self-defence'](#), voted **for** a US-backed resolution on 25th October that called for 'humanitarian pauses' while reaffirming Israel's 'right to self defence', and voted **against** a further Russian resolution which called for a more robust 'humanitarian ceasefire' - again on the grounds that it ['failed to recognize Israel's right to self-defence'](#).

With the veto power afforded to the 5 permanent members of the council, none of the resolutions were adopted.

Britain's Domestic policy developments

- The British government's full-throated support for Israel's actions abroad have been matched, predictably by an increase of repression against Palestine solidarity at home.
- Shortly after Israel's assault on Gaza in 2021, the British government proscribed Hamas in its entirety under the Terrorism Act 2000 - having proscribed Lebanese Hezbollah in its entirety in 2019, and having banned many other Palestinian groups over the years under the Act.

Much of the repression against Palestine solidarity this time round has therefore sought to connect support for Palestine, or Palestinian resistance, as criminal glorification of Hamas as an organisation.

- Home Secretary Suella Braverman has sought to impinge on solidarity protests with Palestine by pre-emptively casting them as potentially anti-semitic or unlawfully glorifying terrorism.

On the 8th of October she stated that she [expected police to use](#) the "full force of the law" against supposed displays of support for Hamas, and on 10th of October she [wrote to police chief constables](#) asking that they 'consider whether chants such as "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" should be understood as an expression of a violent desire to see Israel erased from the world, and whether its use in certain contexts may amount to a racially aggravated section 5 public order offence'.

The letter also argued that 'Behaviours that are legitimate in some circumstances, for example the waving of a Palestinian flag, may not be legitimate such as when intended to glorify acts of terrorism.'

- While neither intervention entailed a change in the law, or extended the police's already extensive powers of repressing protests, they did offer effective licence to police forces to crack down on demonstrations and approach them from a law and order

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perspective - rather than seeing them as legitimate forms of political expression.

- After news coverage of demonstrators at a Hizb-ut Tahrir protest calling for jihad to defend the Palestinians emerged a few weeks into the assault, Suella Braverman again intervened by [demanding an explanation](#) from the Metropolitan Police as to why they took no action against the protestors - who were assessed as having not committed any offence.

In response, the Metropolitan chief Mark Rowley laid the gauntlet down to the government to change the law to close 'loopholes' that enabled such protests, stating that [‘perhaps the line of the law is not in the right place’](#) on such matters.

Both he and ex-Commissioner for Countering Extremism Sara Khan promoted their 2021 report *Operating with Impunity*, which called for the introduction of a new criminal framework to tackle 'hateful extremism', effectively bridging the gap between anti-hate crime powers and counter-terror powers, which could presumably be used to criminalise such incidents in future.

- Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation Jonathan Hall [also intervened with a further proposal](#), of making an offence of "having a flag that is associated with terrorism generally." This could be the Shahada black flag' - and/or of using public order powers to crackdown on protestors further.

While it was reported that Downing Street had no intentions to change the law at this point - instead, police forces [received 'clarified guidance'](#) on hate crime laws - it amounted to a politicisation of existing law and an open attempt to skew the field against pro-Palestine protests.

- The security industry has also sought to exploit the situation.

As mentioned earlier, ex-Commissioner for Countering Extremism Sara Khan intervened early on to [promote her 2021 report](#) with Mark Rowley and call for increasing the scope of criminalisation.

Current Commissioner Robin Simcox also [delivered a speech on 19th October](#) to the defence thinktank RUSI which included reinforcing calls to proscribe the Iranian state's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) under the Terrorism Act.

- In January of this year, a non-binding Early Day Motion was passed in Parliament calling on the government to proscribe the IRGC, with Labour [joining shortly thereafter](#) with demands to proscribe the unit, on account of 'long-standing concerns about Iran's threats to Israel, and its support for violent groups across the region', among other things.

The Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation Jonathan Hall [sounded caution on the demands](#), stating that the use of terrorism powers on a state entity like the IRGC risk 'destabilis[ing] the UK's definition of terrorism and put[ting] international allies' military forces in scope of the law'.

It is not clear as of writing whether the government will act on the proscription demands.

- The education sector has also been a major site of intervention by the government to smother Palestine solidarity too.

The Education Secretary [wrote to university vice chancellors](#) urging them to 'act "swiftly and decisively" to stamp out "implicit or explicit" threats to Jewish students' by cracking down on pro-Palestine student groups, and to refer students to Prevent.

Meanwhile the immigration minister actioned his department to consider [how to revoke visas](#) of foreign students and workers 'on national security grounds where there is evidence of discrimination or support for

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- [Hamas] in the wake of its attack on Israel.' Importantly, this could include incidents that fall below any criminal threshold.

As of 25th October, it was revealed that visa revocation [proceedings had already been initiated](#) in a 'small number of cases'.

prosecute modern crimes.

The latest of these was a failed attempt by the Home Secretary and Security Minister to [amend the National Security Bill](#) (now Act) to include a reform of the Treason laws.

Attempted Queen assassin sentenced for treason, in first such case in over 40 years

- An individual who attempted to assassinate the late Queen with a crossbow on Christmas day 2021 has been [convicted of treason](#), the first such conviction since 1981.
- Evidence indicates that the attacker, Jaswant Singh Chail, was a mentally disturbed individual, and had been motivated to carry out his attack by an AI chatbot companion.

He had claimed that his assassination attempt was in revenge for the 1919 Amritsar Massacre carried out by British forces in British-ruled India.

Under the terms of his 'hybrid order' sentence he will be held at Broadmoor psychiatric hospital, and then transferred to prison to serve his sentence when he is deemed well enough.

- Chail's conviction comes in context where there have been announcements and attempts by the government to amend and update the archaic Treason Act to