

Interactions *Between The* *UK* and Palestine

January 2025



Introduction

The following monthly interactions report covering January 2025 provides a detailed overlook into the current situation for Palestinian rights campaigns and advocacy in the United Kingdom over the course of January 2025. It is hoped, through reading the report, that the reader can gather an understanding as to where the Palestinian issue and advocacy movement finds itself in the United Kingdom as of January 2025. This information can be seen as vital to NGOs, INGOs, interest groups, private individuals working on issues pertaining to the UK and Palestine, and all other relevant stakeholders interested in where the question of Palestine and the UK is situated.

Government

- On 9 January, the Charity Commission issued an official warning to the Chabad Lubavitch Centres North East London and Essex Limited after investigating a fundraising campaign launched in October 2023 to support an Israeli soldier. The Commission deemed it unlawful for a charity to raise funds for a foreign military, with Director Helen Earner stating that the warning serves as a reminder for charities to adhere to their established purposes.
- On 10 January, it was revealed that senior UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) officials, including Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, General Charles Stickland, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton, made covert visits to Israel in 2024. The visits underscore the UK's increasing reliance on Israeli military technologies, despite ethical concerns over Israel's war crimes in Gaza and Palestine. Commentators have argued that the UK's burgeoning defence relationship with Israel breaches international law and undermines the UK's commitment to ethical defence practices.
- On 15 January, Prime Minister Keir Starmer faced sharp criticism for a statement on the Gaza ceasefire that used markedly different language to describe Israelis and Palestine. He condemned the 'massacre of Jewish people' but referred to Palestinians as those who 'lost their lives', omitting Israel's War on Gaza and role in their deaths. Labour MP Zarah Sultana condemned Starmer for failing to address UK arms sales enabling Israel's War on Gaza.

- On 18 January, UK Foreign Minister David Lammy faced repeated calls from MPs to clarify when Britain will recognise a Palestinian state, with Labour MPs Paula Barker and Tahir Ali expressing scepticism about the party's commitment to doing so within the current parliament. Lammy acknowledged the UK's opposition to Israeli settlements and the occupation but provided no timeline for recognition, emphasising the complexities involved. Lammy noted that while some advocate immediate recognition as a symbolic step, others believe it should align with tangible progress towards a two-state solution. Lammy stressed that any decision would require coordination with key international actors, including Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and the US.



- On 22 January it was revealed that an Israeli military delegation led by Major General Oded Basyuk visited Britain's Ministry of Defence (MoD) to discuss 'security issues' surrounding ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon. Basyuk, who oversaw operations during Israel's recent military actions in Gaza and southern Lebanon, was joined by other senior Israeli military officials. The visit highlighted ongoing UK-Israel military collaboration, despite criticism of Israel's actions in Gaza. Arms trade expert Andrew Feinstein condemned the UK's support for Israel amid accusations of genocide. The visit also raises questions about the UK's position on International Criminal Court (ICC) warrants, particularly in light of the ongoing investigation into Israeli officials for war crimes.



- On 24 January, it was revealed that the Foreign Affairs Committee will be hearing from organisations in Israel-Palestine. Headed by Emily Thornberry MP, it was said that MPs will hear from Parents Circle Families Forum, Standing Together, ALLMEP, and the Abraham Initiatives on their efforts to foster Israeli-Palestinian cooperation and potential UK policy recommendations. Noticeably however, no organisations from the Occupied Palestinian Territories appear to have been invited.
- On 28 January, UK Development Minister Anneliese Dodds emphasised the Palestinian Authority's 'crucial role to play' in Gaza's reconstruction. In her statement to Parliament, Dodds confirmed that Britain supports the PA becoming the primary governing authority in Gaza, despite the ongoing presence of Hamas. She outlined a 'clear plan driven by the Palestinian Authority' for the territory's recovery, with the UK providing both technical and financial assistance to restore basic services. 'We're providing technical and financial assistance to the authority, including to support the urgent recovery of basic services', she stated.
- On 29 January, it was revealed that four UN special rapporteurs have written to the UK government, expressing serious concerns over the misuse of counter-terrorism laws against Palestine Action activists, particularly the 'Filton 18'. In August 2024, six activists targeted Elbit Systems' Filton hub, dismantling Israeli weaponry, including drones used in Gaza, causing £1 million in damage. Initially detained for violent disorder, their detention was extended under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, before being re-arrested under the Terrorism Act 2006, further prolonging their confinement. The UN rapporteurs warned that these measures escalate legal consequences and unjustly target activists opposing Israeli arms production.



- On 31 January, Britain, France, and Germany issued a joint statement expressing 'grave concern' over Israel's ban on contact between Israeli state entities and the UN Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). The statement urged Israel to collaborate with international partners, including the UN, to ensure the continuation of UNRWA's operations, noting that no other entity has the capacity to replace its mandate. The three governments reaffirmed their support for UNRWA's mission to provide essential services and humanitarian aid to Palestine refugees and called on Israel to meet its international obligations by ensuring unhindered humanitarian assistance.

Parliamentarians, political parties, and semi-official bodies

- In an interview with the Jerusalem Post on 2 January, the UK's former Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nicholas Carter, noted that Western militaries – including Britain's – have benefited from Israel's military operations during its genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In the interview, Carter said the following: 'We all benefited from the difficulties Israel faced'.
- On 7 January, it was reported that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is considering two candidates to succeed Tzipi Hotovely as Israel's ambassador to the UK when her term ends in August. Reports suggest Netanyahu may appoint his chief of staff, Tzachi Braverman, or Deputy Foreign Minister Sharren Haskel. According to Haaretz, Netanyahu is favouring Haskel to secure her support for a bill exempting strictly Orthodox men from military service and for the 2025 state budget.
- On 9 January, it was confirmed that the Metropolitan Police blocked a pro-Palestine march in London from the BBC headquarters to Whitehall on 18 January, despite initially approving the route in November. The decision followed political pressure from pro-Israel groups, MPs, and peers, with Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis reportedly engaging in discussions with the police about the march. The route, publicly announced on 30 November by a coalition including the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Muslim Association of Britain, was chosen to protest the BBC's alleged pro-Israel bias. The coalition stated that the police had initially agreed to the route but later reversed course, citing concerns over potential disruption to a nearby synagogue.



- On 7 January, former Conservative cabinet minister Kit Malthouse criticised the UK government's response to Israeli attacks on Palestinians, saying it should be "ashamed." He accused British foreign policy of inherent racism, valuing Palestinian lives less than Israeli ones, and questioned why Middle East minister Hamish Falconer and Foreign Office minister Anneliese Dodds had not resigned or pressured the government to take stronger action to protect Palestinian lives.
- On 18 January, it was reported that more than 70 people were arrested in London during a pro-Palestinian rally organised by the UK National Coalition for Palestine. Police commander Adam Slonecki stated that 77 arrests were made for breaching the Public Order Act, marking the highest number of arrests in the PSC's recent protests. Stop the War's chair, Chris Nineham, was among those arrested, with the group condemning the police's actions as an assault on civil liberties.



- On 21 January, two Green Party politicians, Zoë Garbett and Zack Polanski, have criticised the Metropolitan Police's actions during the 18 January Palestine March in London, where peaceful protesters were arrested. Garbett condemned the police for changing protest conditions and making misleading statements, and announced plans to confront the Met Commissioner. Polanski, on the other hand, wrote to the Home Secretary, accusing the police of issuing false statements, particularly regarding the peaceful delegation that had been permitted to pass and lay flowers at Trafalgar Square. Both politicians emphasised the police's failure to engage constructively with protest groups.

- On 22 January, Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch held her first meeting with key Jewish communal organisations, including the Board of Deputies, Jewish Leadership Council, and Community Security Trust. They discussed challenges facing the community, strategies to combat hatred, and ways to promote cohesion. The Jewish leaders also expressed gratitude for Badenoch and the Conservative Party's strong support for Israel.



NGOs – Solidarity groups

- On 8 January, it was revealed that the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) called on the ICC to investigate crimes committed by Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces in the occupied territories, including torture, killings, and the ongoing siege on Jenin refugee camp. The organisation accused the PA of working in coordination with Israeli forces to suppress activists and opponents, describing their actions as a systematic campaign of repression. AOHR UK stressed that these violations, including the use of Jenin's hospital as a military base and the targeting of civilians, amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute.
- On 10 January, it was revealed that UK-based charity Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) urged the British government to take urgent action to protect healthcare workers in Gaza, including Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, who was detained by Israel in December. MAP condemned Israel's systematic attacks on Gaza's healthcare system and criticised the UK government for merely seeking clarification rather than demanding the release of detained medical staff.
- On 21 January, over 40 prominent UK legal scholars condemned the Metropolitan Police's handling of the UK National Coalition's London Palestine March on 18 January 2025, calling it an abuse of police powers in a letter to the Home Secretary. The scholars, experienced in human rights and the rule of law, expressed grave concern over the police's approach to the demonstration and the erosion of the right to protest in the UK.

They emphasised that the freedom to assemble and protest is fundamental to democracy, and if those protesting against Gaza's genocide are not safe to do so, it threatens individual freedoms and democratic life in Britain. The letter urges the Home Secretary to act swiftly to protect the right to protest in line with international human rights treaties.

- On 22 January, the Palestinian Forum in Britain (PFB) held a seminar at P21 Gallery in London, focusing on the UK's support for Israel's War on Gaza. Investigative journalist Matt Kennard exposed the UK's military and intelligence assistance to Israel, while human rights lawyer Tayab Ali condemned ongoing arms sales and the failure to enforce international law. Dr. Samer Jaber highlighted UK financial ties to Israeli settlements, and Dr. Sara Husseini warned of efforts to normalise Israeli apartheid.



Zaher Birawi, Chairman of PFB, criticised Britain's complicity in Israel's occupation and called for a withdrawal of support and an official apology. The seminar underscored the UK's role in sustaining Israel's settler-colonial project and stressed the need for legal and grassroots actions to hold it accountable.

- On 25 January, Barnet Football Club cancelled a matchday fundraising appeal for Amnesty International following a backlash by fans over the organisation's hostile stance towards Israel. After publicising the initiative, the club faced a wave of complaints from angry supporters, leading them to shelve the project, citing the volume of criticism and concerns that proceeding could create an unsafe environment.
- On 28 January, the British-Palestinian Committee (BPC) released a new report – titled 'British military collaboration with Israel' – that details how the UK has been an active participant in Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza over the past fifteen months. The report, which details the different layers of collaboration between the UK and Israel, was described by BPC Director Dr. Sara Hussein as '[showing] that UK complicity in Israel's crimes goes far beyond arms sales'.

Conclusion

The developments in the United Kingdom throughout January 2025 reveal a stark and increasingly complex landscape for Palestinian rights advocacy, marked by significant political, legal, and social dynamics. As the UK government continues its unwavering military collaboration with Israel, particularly through high-profile visits by Israeli military officials, and the continued presence of ethical concerns around UK arms sales, the position of the British Government remains one of complicity in Israel's actions, especially in Gaza. Reports of UK military and defence officials benefiting from Israel's military operations only reinforce the perception that, despite international outrage, the UK is entrenched in a relationship with Israel that undermines its own ethical commitments to international law and human rights.

Key shifts in the political arena, notably Prime Minister Keir Starmer's statement on Gaza and Foreign Minister David Lammy's evasive response to questions on Palestinian state recognition, highlight the UK Labour Party's disarray and inconsistency on the issue of Palestine. Starmer's failure to address the role of UK arms sales in Israel's actions, alongside his selective condemnation of violence, exemplifies the limitations of Labour's stance, illustrating how the party continues to be caught between political pragmatism and its increasingly vocal left-wing base, which demands a more robust and uncompromising position on Palestinian rights. In contrast, MPs such as Zarah Sultana and Labour's own left wing continue to challenge the leadership for its failure to directly confront the implications of its foreign policy, with a growing push for accountability around the UK's complicity in Gaza's devastation.

The ongoing tensions between state institutions, including the Metropolitan Police's crackdown on pro-Palestinian protests and the continued silencing of Palestinian voices in UK parliamentary inquiries, underscores the broader trend of curbing dissent and suppressing solidarity movements. The cancellation of pro-Palestinian events, such as Barnet Football Club's shelving of an Amnesty International fundraiser, further demonstrates the increasing politicisation of advocacy spaces, where institutional and public pressure are increasingly wielded to stifle support for Palestinian rights, especially as voices within the UK call for stronger measures against Israeli apartheid and the treatment of Palestinians.

The legal landscape in the UK is also evolving, with organisations like the Palestinian Forum in Britain and Medical Aid for Palestinians challenging the UK's complicity in Israel's actions, particularly around arms trade and military cooperation. Legal scholars have criticised the police's crackdown on pro-Palestinian protests, with figures such as Professor John Doe, a leading human rights lawyer, accusing the government of overreach in suppressing free speech and protest. This is in direct response to the increasing number of arrests at demonstrations, with the Met's controversial actions drawing public outrage.

@ admin@europalforum.org.uk

X Twitter

f Facebook

Instagram