

Interactions *Between The* *UK* and Palestine

February 2025



Introduction

The following monthly interactions report covering February 2025 provides a detailed overlook into the current situation for Palestinian rights campaigns and advocacy in the United Kingdom over the course of February 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 February 2025. This information can be seen as vital to those 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 3 February, the UK Government confirmed that it had granted Israeli General Oded Basyuk and his delegation special diplomatic immunity during their visit to Britain on 21-22 January, blocking any potential legal action under universal jurisdiction. Basyuk, responsible for Israeli military operations in Gaza and Lebanon, held meetings with the Ministry of Defence, Foreign Office, and Cabinet Office. This follows a long-standing Israeli effort to weaken Britain's universal jurisdiction laws, culminating in 2011 legislation requiring the Director of Public Prosecutions' approval for arrest warrants against foreign officials.



- On 5 February, the UK's Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, distanced the UK from U.S. President Donald Trump's plan to take over Gaza and turn it into the 'Riviera of the Middle East', stressing that Palestinians must be allowed to return and rebuild. Speaking in the House of Commons, Starmer reaffirmed the UK's commitment to a two-state solution and a sustained ceasefire.
- On 6 February, the UK Government opposed Donald Trump's proposal to relocate Palestinians from Gaza, with Foreign Office Minister Anneliese Dodds stating that any forced displacement would violate international law. Trump, alongside Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, suggested turning Gaza into a 'Riviera' and having the US 'own' it, drawing global condemnation. Despite cross-party calls, however, Dodds refused to label forced removal as ethnic cleansing but affirmed that blocking Gazans from returning home would be unlawful.



- On 13 February, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said a judge was wrong to grant a Palestinian family the right to live in the UK through a scheme originally meant for Ukrainian refugees, pledging to close the ‘legal loophole’.

The family, whose home was destroyed in Gaza, was allowed to join their brother in the UK after an immigration judge ruled the Home Office's rejection breached their human rights, citing the severe risks to their children, aged seven to 18. Speaking in the House of Commons, Starmer stated: ‘It should be Parliament that makes the rules on immigration, it should be the government that makes the policy’, confirming the Home Office is working to close the loophole.

- On 19 February, UK Minister Anneliese Dodds voiced concern over Israel’s attacks on and closure of UN-run schools in occupied East Jerusalem, stressing the critical role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in providing education for Palestinian children. Her statement followed Israeli Occupation Forces raiding multiple UNRWA facilities in East Jerusalem, including a training centre and three schools, using tear gas and sound bombs to forcibly evacuate students and staff. ‘Children’s access to education must continue uninterrupted’, Dodds stated, calling Israel’s actions ‘deeply worrying’. Linking to this, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini reported that over 600 students and trainees were affected, while UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the raids as a breach of UN premises and denounced Israel’s actions as ‘unnecessary and unacceptable’.

Parliamentarians, political parties, and semi-official bodies

- On 5 February, pressure mounted on Keir Starmer's Labour Government to oppose US President Donald Trump's declaration that the US will 'own Gaza' and forcibly displace Palestinians. A motion signed by over 30 MPs was tabled in the UK parliament, urging the government to explicitly reject Trump's proposals, which critics, including Green Party MP Ellie Chowns and Independent MP Shockat Adam, denounced as 'ethnic cleansing'. The motion emphasises that forcible transfers of people from occupied territories violate international law.
- On 5 February, the leader of Reform UK, Nigel Farage MP, expressed support for Donald Trump's proposal to turn Gaza into 'the Riviera of the Middle East', calling the idea of a thriving, wealthy region with casinos and nightlife 'very appealing'. Speaking at a Westminster press conference, the Reform UK leader and Trump ally welcomed the ambition behind the plan.
- On 7 February, UK MPs condemned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for suggesting that Palestinians should establish a state in Saudi Arabia instead of their homeland. Labour MP Afzal Khan called the proposal 'barbaric' and an attempt at ethnic cleansing, while fellow Labour MP Kim Johnson labelled it 'absurd and insulting', urging the UK government to recognise a Palestinian state. Independent MP Adnan Hussain dismissed Netanyahu's words as those of a 'war criminal', and Green Party deputy leader Zack Polanski criticised the Labour government for not taking a stronger stance. Analysts suggest Netanyahu's remarks were aimed at appeasing his base and resisting pressure for concessions in potential Saudi-Israeli normalisation talks.

- On 9 February, the Guardian reported that two NHS professionals, a therapist and a nurse, were investigated and barred from their workplace for discussing a peaceful pro-Palestine protest during their lunch break. Accused of endangering staff safety and bringing their trust into disrepute, they were barred from their building and redeployed, though a three-month investigation later found no case to answer and confirmed the trust had breached its own disciplinary policy. The pair, known as Layla and Maya, have filed a grievance against the Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust and are now taking their case to an employment tribunal, alleging discrimination over their anti-Zionist beliefs. The case highlights growing tensions in the NHS over staff expressing views on Palestine, with similar incidents prompting reviews across England.

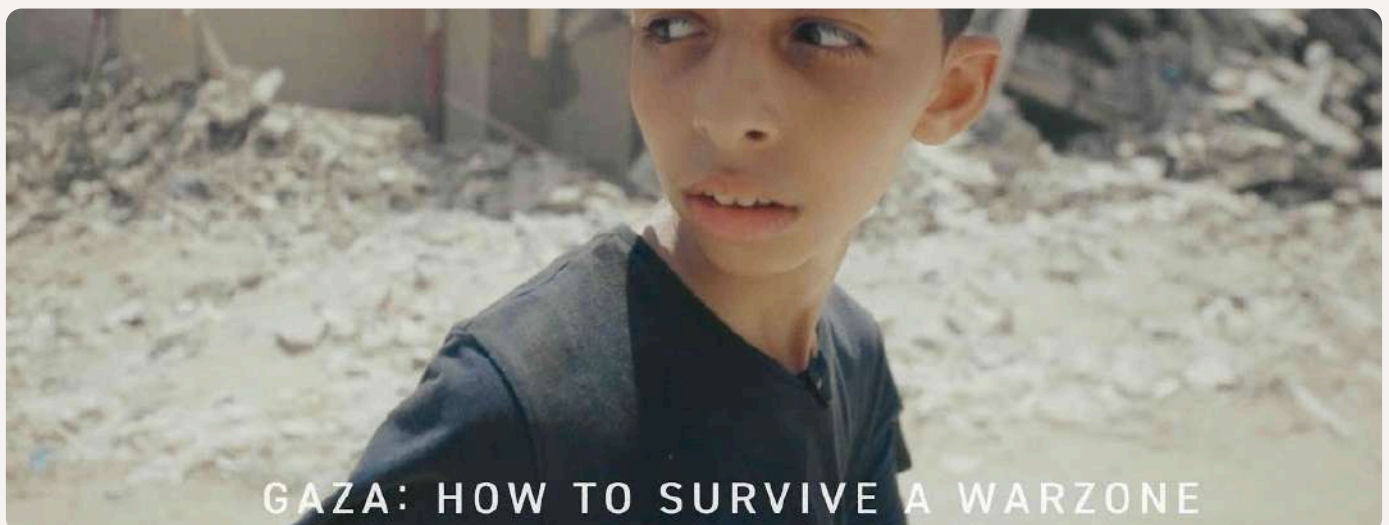


- On 18 February, North Somerset Council passed a motion urging the Avon Pension Fund to divest from companies complicit in Israel's illegal military occupation and apartheid. This move followed months of pressure from local campaigners, including Weston-super-Mare and Clevedon Friends of Palestine. The motion specifically calls for pulling investments from arms manufacturers supplying Israel and corporations operating in illegal settlements.

While some councillors, like Hugh Malyan (Labour), opposed it, arguing it unfairly singled out Israel, others, such as Labour's Hannah Young, insisted it was about ethical investment, not foreign policy. 'We have a duty to consider what our public money is being used for', Young said. With Bristol City Council having passed a similar motion earlier, all eyes are now on the Avon Pension Fund, which will review its £6bn portfolio on 28 March to determine if it will cut ties with companies profiting from Israel's human rights abuses.



- On 19 February, it was revealed that two senior academics at University of Westminster, Dibyesh Anand and Nitasha Kaul, gave keynote speeches at a November 2024 conference hosted by Tel Aviv University, an institution closely linked to the Israeli military. The university collaborates with Israeli arms manufacturers and houses the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), which played a key role in developing the Dahiya doctrine—a military strategy advocating the destruction of civilian infrastructure.
- On 21 February, it was revealed that the BBC removed its documentary ‘Gaza: How to Survive a Warzone’ from its BBC iPlayer platform following pressure over the featured child narrator, Abdullah Alyazouri, being the son of a Palestinian minister from Gaza. Critics, including the Israel’s Ambassador to the UK Tzipi Hotovely and UK culture secretary Lisa Nandy MP, raised concerns after researcher David Collier highlighted Alyazouri's family ties. A group of 45 Jewish media figures also pressured the BBC to pull the film, calling the minister a ‘terrorist leader’. Defenders of the documentary, such as Chris Doyle of CAABU and journalist Richard Sanders, have condemned the decision to remove the film and have argued that the films humanised Palestinian children and provided rare insight into life under Israel’s bombardment.



- On 21 February, Scottish Greens MSP Ross Greer called on the UK Government to 'come clean' about a recent RAF military supply flight to Israel, demanding transparency on the military support the UK Labour Government is providing to Israel. The flight, an Airbus A400M, took off from RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus on the 19th of February and landed in Tel Aviv before returning the same evening.

Greer condemned any assistance to Israel, particularly following Prime Minister Netanyahu's recent plans to expel 2.2 million Palestinians from Gaza, calling it complicity in crimes against humanity. He noted, 'The UK Government cannot claim to stand for human rights while secretly supporting a genocidal regime'.

- On 26 February, it was revealed that the University of Cambridge is seeking a High Court injunction to ban pro-Palestinian student protests until 2030. The injunction would prohibit students from occupying key university sites, including The Old Schools/Senate House Site and Greenwich House, as well as protesting on the surrounding streets. The case will be heard at the High Court on 27 February.

NGOs – Solidarity groups

- On 5 February, six human rights organisations, including War on Want, Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT), and the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN), sent a joint letter to UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy, condemning the UK's ongoing arms transfers to Israel amid its genocide on Gaza. Citing 'overwhelming evidence' of war crimes and genocide, they criticised the UK for maintaining military support despite previous acknowledgments of the legal risks. The letter highlighted the government's failure to engage meaningfully on these concerns and its decision to exempt F-35 fighter jet components from arms suspensions.

- On 19 February, British travel writer Matthew Teller resigned from the Society of Authors (SoA) over its weak response to Israel's arrest of his friend and co-author, Palestinian bookseller Mahmoud Muna, and his nephew Ahmad in occupied East Jerusalem. Israeli police raided their shop, confiscated books, and accused them of 'disturbing public order'. Teller criticised the SoA for failing to name Israel as the perpetrator and vowed to cancel his membership until it takes a stronger stand for writers facing oppression.
- Appearing at Westminster Magistrates Court on 21 February, Palestine Solidarity Campaign Director Ben Jamal pleaded not guilty to three charges under the Public Order Act after being arrested following a pro- Palestine protest on 18 January. The protest, restricted by police over concerns from senior Jewish leaders, saw 77 arrests—the highest since Gaza protests began in October 2023. Organisers disputed the restrictions, noting prior marches had not disrupted nearby sites.

A statement issued by Jamal reads the following: 'Today I am in court challenging the unjust charges laid against me. The draconian anti-protest laws being used to silence protest are an affront to democracy in the UK'.

Conclusion

During February 2025, the UK Government's support for Israel continued to pose challenges to Palestinian rights campaigns. For example, the Government's granting of diplomatic immunity to Israeli General Oded Basyuk, despite his role in Israel's illegal military operations in Gaza, further deepened concerns over the UK's complicity in international human rights violations. With this, however, the Government's subsequent rejection of Trump's Gaza ethnic cleansing plan, and condemnation of forced displacements, signaled a more cautious stance in certain areas, despite the UK's overall complicity in military support for Israel.

Moreover, the actions of UK parliamentarians played a pivotal role during the month, with MPs like Afzal Khan and Kim Johnson openly condemning Netanyahu's provocative remarks, and a significant number of MPs signing motions and statements calling for the rejection of Trump's Gaza plan, emphasising violations of international law.

On the societal front, grassroots movements were empowered by protests and campaigns, exemplified by the London march on 15 February, where an estimated 150,000+ individuals united in opposition to the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the news of Trump's ethnic cleansing plan. Here, within the solidarity movement, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and other NGOs continued to expose institutional complicity, especially the exposure of investments within the Local Government Pension Scheme in companies supporting Israeli apartheid.

While institutional barriers to Palestinian advocacy remain formidable, including the BBC's removal of the Gaza documentary under pressure, February's developments showcased an increasingly vocal public, empowered grassroots movements, and shifting parliamentary dynamics. These changes are pivotal as the UK's position on Palestine continues to evolve amidst domestic and international pressures. As strategic advocacy builds momentum, the continued push for divestment, legal action, and a moral re-engagement with Palestine will be crucial in challenging the UK's complicity in Israel's occupation and human rights violations.

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