



# Foreign & Commonwealth Office

## STATEMENT ON THE MIDDLE EAST PROCESS

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Deputy Speaker,

The prospect of a prosperous, politically stable and peaceful Middle East is rooted in the future of the States of Israel and Palestine working side-by-side. This is a position based in historical fact and an acknowledgement of the inevitable future. The question is not whether Israel will remain at the heart of events in the Middle East, but what sort of future it seeks for itself and its neighbours. If it seeks a future of dominance, abuse, human rights violations, and violence – history shows us that this is the future it will have. Yet if it seeks a future of peace, cooperation, and brotherhood with its neighbours, that future is a realistic possibility in our lifetimes and is one this Government wholly wishes to pursue, encourage and work towards achieving.

The United Kingdom must be willing to play a dual role with the State of Israel: that of a supportive partner and a constructive critic when it needs to, and it is this Government that will ensure the voices of all parties involved are heard and actioned in pursuit of peace and stability in the Middle East. With the United Kingdom rising up to the challenge and Israel working with us to form a stronger, newer relationship, we can contribute to a partnership that can see an enduring peace in the Middle East for the first time in a century.

We cannot consider the future of our relationship with Israel without taking stock of the past. The first four decades of Israel's existence was rocked by hardship and conflict. Hardship took the shape of poverty, economic instability, and domestic struggle. Conflict took the shape of major wars throughout the years. Israel was the overwhelming victor in those conflicts, each time being able to dictate the future of the region as a result of its victories. The large-scale conflicts of massed armies and tanks gave way to large-scale domestic disturbances and unrest, in the form of militant organisations and two intifadas in the following decades. The Israeli people have been shaped by decades of conflict, and it can be incredibly difficult to see beyond conflict when one's lenses have been distorted by the harsh realities of war.

Yet even though Israel saw victories in conflict, many politicians knew in their heart that conflict could not be their path forever. Too many Israeli and Arab youth have died for peace not to be a longing desire. Those feelings, and the urging of the international community gave way to stunning peace agreements that forever changed the trajectory of the region. The Camp David Accords, the Oslo Accords, the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty, and growing international recognition for Israel were all the direct result of international influence working with Israeli leaders who saw the powerful implications of peace and resisted immense pressures at home. Leaders who could see further than the next Knesset poll, or hear the praise of future generations above the criticism of current ones.

The story of Palestine too is filled with heartbreak, tears and violence. From being a pawn in many international games, to being forced from their homes and into refugee camps for generations, to being simply ignored by the international community; their struggle is real and it is painful. Imagine having walls built in your community to divide you. Imagine seeing your leaders targeted for assassination. Think of being trapped in a cycle of poverty, violence, settlement camps and being unable to even dream of a different future for you and your children. Taking dreams away from people is how you destroy them. Taking away the ability of people to hope for a better future is in itself an act of hatred and vengeance.

Yet even in the darkest days, in the most difficult times, Palestinians remained and still remain hopeful – it is perseverance and a level of determination not many people have. They saw what international support could bring – glimmers of hope. They saw that rejecting violence and militantism could bring about at least limited self-governance and recognition. With the level of support and assistance this Government is willing to provide to Palestinians and by working with their official representatives, they will see that our promises are simply not lip service to an idea, but a commitment to them and to the concept of ensuring long-lasting peace and stability in the region.

The last seven decades of the history of the region have been building to this exact moment. History has given us two versions of the same story: one path filled with bloodshed and endless violence, and another path filled with the potential for peace and stability. The international community is increasingly coming to the realisation that what we have tried in the past has only brought us so far and there is still so much more to do. We cannot continue to turn a blind eye to setbacks, violence and inhumanity when we see it. We must take a stronger, more vocal role in bringing people to the negotiating table while establishing basic human rights as a foundation, a minimum expectation. This Government will make its stance and commitment to Middle Eastern peace known by rejecting and standing against militancy and terrorism. The future of the region is not simply the best it can be, but is at a crossroads of either peace and stability or a collapse of this temporary calm giving way to the horrors of the past. The United Kingdom will endlessly and tirelessly work to help tip the scales in favour of peace in the upcoming months.

We recognise the sovereignty and legitimacy of the Palestinian people. Their elected figures are the rightful voice and representatives of the Palestinian people. The ongoing violence across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories must stop. Any future changes to the borders of Palestine and Israel must be determined by mutual agreement with international arbitration. The future of settlements built illegally on Palestinian land must be negotiated. Palestinians must not be broken off from access to the international economy, and must have access to decent jobs and income. Palestinians must be afforded the ability to enforce security in its own territories, and with it the obligations of preventing terrorism just as Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence and the right to defend its citizens from attack. Palestinians must never be subjected to illegal and inhumane blockades of humanitarian goods and services necessary for life. This position is one this Government is wholly determined to exemplify; a position which reflects the rule of law, the support for the rights of sovereign states and the only path forward for long-term peace and stability in the Middle East.

Similarly, we must be clear about our position on Israel. We wholeheartedly support the existence of the State of Israel and recognise its legitimate right to self-defence. We regard Israel as a diverse, democratic society and a critical partner in the Middle East. The Israeli people deserve peace, prosperity, and stability and all of the rights and privileges afforded to them by the Charter of the United Nations. Britain must be a partner of Israel, but not an apologist. We must be willing to support Israel when it is the right thing to do, but also be very frank with our criticisms and clear with our expectations. Israel does not need

fair-weather friends, and Britain does not require partners that act only in their own interests or neglect the duality of partnership. The United Kingdom has a long history with Israel. The decades following the independence of Israel saw our relationship grow and improve in ways which have given us unique opportunities to build a constructive partnership to influence the future of the entire region. We should be proud of the efforts Britain has made to promote peace in the region, even if those efforts have not always been successful; this Government will continue to build upon those efforts and will not shy away from responsibility.

The Government shares a fundamental belief that the veins of peace which run through Israeli politics run deep, they need only be brought to the surface. A new generation of Israelis and their politicians must begin to understand the immense moral weight of the decisions they will make. They must recognise the power of the international community and realise that friends of Israel, true friends of Israel will not continue to turn a blind eye to unacceptable behaviour. Britain, with the rest of the world, can help bridge the gap between both sides and get them back on the road to peace. Britain can be a vocal, unapologetic voice for two equal states with a shared destiny and put our resources into meaningful breakthroughs in negotiations.

We must restore decency to politics and to international diplomacy. We must be willing to embrace a world vision for a better future, chart a course to reach it and be willing to make the tough decisions to get us there. This is not the politics of folly, or pipe dreams and fairytales. These are objectives within reach. Britain must be willing to use all of the economic, diplomatic and international tools at its disposal to help lead Israel, Palestine and indeed the world to a better future, and that is what we will do. Not a future dictated by us, or imposed upon others, but a future genuinely desired by all nations. However, this will require our support and guidance to become a reality — it can be done and the Government will pave the way to achieve this objective.

Our diplomatic and economic pressure, at times even painful pressure, coupled with financial support and assistance in the region, are investments in the future we want to see and not in supporting the status quo. We must be strong partners with our allies across the globe to strengthen pressure on Israel when it is appropriate to do so. We must have the ear of the United States, and they must come to a new understanding of the word "friendship" with Israel. The Government is committed in working with our Arab friends so they too can see the benefit of investments and partnerships, of shared responsibility for the future of the Palestinian people. We must help direct aid to lift Palestinians up, but not tear Israelis down. There is no zero-sum game, both Israel and Palestine can be successful, prosperous and peaceful in the long term. Our future with Israel is linked to our willingness to push forward, and their willingness to give and reconcile. We cannot expect immediate, sweeping victories but we know the price of inaction.

International recognition of Palestine would serve the causes of peace, justice and international law. We must consider the inferior positions Palestinian negotiators have been put in before around the negotiation table and actively work to change it. The injustices faced by Palestinians cannot be stated lightly. Violence, bloodshed and murder against Palestinian civilians and journalists must cease, Shireen Abu Akleh's murder is but one of many cases of Palestinian civilians and journalists targeted for simply working to deliver the truth; these heinous acts are clear violations of international law. The United Kingdom is absolutely committed to working hard to protect Palestinian lives and respect their self-determination; we are committed in doing everything in our power to accelerate peace negotiations and give them a better chance of succeeding. We also urge our partners and allies to join us in this commitment to do right upholding and pushing through harder to obtain peace.

To this end, the United Kingdom will begin the process by upgrading and broadening the status of Palestinian diplomats and the Palestinian mission in the UK to an Embassy. We aim to relocate and further expand the Palestinian diplomatic post, alongside an increase in diplomatic staff is a vital step to provide huge potential and opportunity in ensuring Britain works towards securing peace between Palestine and Israel, and will help us deepen our relationship across the Middle East. We recognise that greater British presence in the Middle East will help ensure we can work with the two states at better countering behaviours and influences which undermine the peace process. The use of the United Kingdom's soft power in this endeavour is absolutely essential to continue winning the hearts and minds of people in achieving this peace.

Over the decades, many UN resolutions have confirmed that Israeli settlements violate international law and calling on Israel to cease all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The United Kingdom recognises these actions heavily and continuously undermine the peace process by criminalising peaceful activities and placing excessive restrictions which impede and disrupt the daily lives of Palestinians. The Government will ban the import of goods produced in Israeli settlements deemed to be illegal in international law, and will be strongly urging Israel to end its settlement expansion in upcoming negotiations. We are committed in urging all parties to commit to constructive acts that help both Israelis and Palestinians coexist and prosper; increasing trade and economic opportunities for both states will help in this regard and prevent either side from taking unilateral actions that could heighten tensions.

We also recognise the humanitarian situation in Gaza requires urgent attention, the United Kingdom reiterates its strong support and commitment for UNRWA and will be stepping up our efforts to meet the needs of Palestinians and calling upon international donors to do the same as they face scarcity of resources.

The Government is also committed to pushing for total inclusion of Palestine within the major intergovernmental organisations and allows them to use international mechanisms and resolutions to address and enact diplomatic measures and also challenge wrongdoings committed against them when required. We recognise the extreme disappointment shared amongst Palestinian and other Arab diplomats over responses to the conflict; our vision and expectation of a truly Global Britain is set considerably higher than just pushing out carefully calibrated messages and empty words.

Furthermore, to help in our commitment to securing peace between both sides, the Foreign Office will be launching a cross-parliamentary fact-finding mission to Israel, the West Bank and Gaza to advance and advocate for a new diplomatic push and solution to this issue. We understand the British Parliament is a broadly respected institution among Palestinians and Israelis and would therefore have a very good chance of conducting an honest and open mission, and could help push forth a renewed diplomatic initiative to strengthen efforts to break the cycle of violence. The mission of course relies on Israel and Palestine to work together, and we will be working hard to pressure both sides to work with us in this endeavour.

We understand the benefits of launching a UK fact-finding mission to contribute to our commitment to renewing diplomatic responses to the conflict and to deliver something more sustainable and beneficial for both parties:

First, this mission will support the pause in hostilities between the two sides; deploying an international team would require close coordination with the local authorities to create time and space for the mission to complete its work and present viable routes to tackle issues head on.

Second, it would help establish not only the causes of recent conflict based on witness evidence, but also better understand the immediate and cumulative impact on all parties involved and on the prospects available for a resolution.

Third, it would provide independent and detailed first-hand knowledge and insight into conditions in Gaza, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Israel, which will help establish facts and also help support a wider diplomatic move.

Fourth, it will provide a foundation for an early warning system to offset another round of conflict - as an interim measure - and charge the international community with responsibilities to actively intervene accordingly.

Lastly, it will itself create a mechanism to channel communication between Israel and the Palestinians at such a critical time. As such, it would be both a catalyst for, and an integral part of, a new international effort to resolve the crisis.

This Government draws a hard line on our belief in Palestine, our hope for Israel, our unwavering commitment to peace and our rejection of the politics of complacency. This is a Government of strength and of courage and it is a pleasure and an honour for me as Foreign Secretary to help lead us to this end and be part of a movement that can and will change Britain and the Middle East for the better.

I commend this statement to the House.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Erudite Fellow', written in a cursive style.

THE RT HON ERUDITEFELLOW MP  
**DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER**  
**SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS**