

Political Affairs Brief

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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House of Lords Short Debate

Israel and Palestine

Lord Dykes: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they will take to promote a resumption of direct talks between Palestinian representatives and Israel to seek a full agreement.

Lord Brett: My Lords, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary is in regular contact with Israeli and Arab partners making clear the need for the parties to resume negotiations as soon as possible. ...

Lord Dykes: Is it not a growing tragedy that the ridiculous antics of the Netanyahu Administration are having the effect of making an excellent country, Israel, almost as unpopular as apartheid South Africa, much to the detriment of millions of its decent citizens who want a peaceful settlement? Does the Minister agree that this farce cannot continue? When will the EU insist on the reversal of recent settlements and on real, proper negotiations, not ones in which the Israelis pretend as they have done in the past?

Lord Brett: My Lords, I sense the frustration in the noble Lord's question, which I am sure is shared in many parts of the House. There is no shortage of hard words about all the parties involved in what we hope is a move towards negotiations for peace in that part of the world, so I should not add to them. Suffice it to say that we continue to believe as a Government-and this thought is held more broadly in Europe-that sharing a full and frank dialogue with the partners in Israel and Palestine is the best way to bring forward what at the end of the day is the only solution, which is a move towards negotiations. ...

Baroness Deech: Does the Minister realise that the ability of this Government to influence any action by the Israeli Government is greatly undermined by, first, the threats to Israeli politicians who might visit this country and, secondly, the rising tide of anti-Semitic incidents, which tend to be connected with events in Israel, so that the relationship is seen as hostile? What does the Minister propose to do to change this situation?

Lord Brett: ... We are candid-some would say critical-friends of Israel and Palestine. We do not abandon that friendship, but neither should we abandon the candid and critical views that we have. ...

Lord Campbell-Savours: My Lords, can my noble friend identify one single benefit to the Palestinian people in the past 43 years since 1967 that has arisen out of the diplomacy to which he referred and to which David Miliband referred yesterday?

Lord Brett: ... We cannot allow our frustration at the parties to lead us to abandon the only course. ... all the parties are trying to do their best. That includes Mr Blair,

who has made a significant contribution to those aims through his work as a quartet representative ...

Lord Wallace of Saltaire: ... Now that it seems that the Obama Administration's efforts to relaunch talks with Israel and Palestine have been blocked by domestic opposition within the United States, should not Britain be pushing with our European partners for the EU to play a more active role in getting talks started again between the two sides?

Lord Brett: ... We should indeed put all our efforts behind the EU and the United States and make our own individual efforts to bring peace to the area. Looking for division is a diversion.

Lord Low of Dalston: My Lords, does the Minister not agree that we need to give some traction to our diplomatic efforts by working with our European partners to bring effective pressure to bear on Israel?

Lord Brett: Effective pressure comes in many ways. The Goldstone report, which has featured in previous Questions, is a case in point. The resolution carried in the General Assembly on 26 February revealed changes in patterns of voting. The United Kingdom was able to vote with the majority to call for what we have been calling for for some time: a full, credible and impartial investigation into all the allegations made by the Goldstone committee. The vote in favour was substantial: there were 91 votes in favour and seven against, with 31 abstentions. That is European unity at its best but also a recognition that the Palestinian delegation had moderated its text and had taken into account the concerns that we raised. ...

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/100302-0001.htm#10030266000735>

UK Parliamentary Questions

Israel-Egypt Frontier

3. Mrs. Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Government of Israel on its plans to build a border wall along Israel's frontier with Egypt. [319384]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Ivan Lewis): We are in regular contact with both the Egyptian and Israeli Governments regarding Gaza and related matters. We recognise Israel's right to protect its citizens from acts of violence but make it clear at every opportunity that all measures must be in accordance with international law.

Mrs. McGuire: I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates that the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to cause grave concern to many, certainly in my constituency. I endorse his words about the security of Israel and acknowledge that the capacity of Hamas to fire rockets into Israel must be stopped, but I would like a reassurance from my hon. Friend that he is doing all he can to persuade Israel and, indeed, Egypt not to forget the people of Gaza who are suffering as a result of the current situation.

Mr. Lewis: The UK and the EU use every opportunity to call on Israel to remove all obstacles to humanitarian assistance getting into Gaza. If we are to secure a mainstream majority for peace, we need to enable Gazans to begin to rebuild their homes, public institutions and businesses. Equally, Hamas must stop rocket attacks against Israel and should release Gilad Shalit without preconditions.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con): The right hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire) has just asked the Minister to discuss the issues regarding Gaza with Israel and to persuade the Israeli Government, but how can we have proper discussions and a proper search for a peaceful solution with Israel when a leading Israeli political figure is threatened with arrest with a warrant issued by a British court under universal jurisdiction? What are the Government doing to clear away this effort to hamper the search for peace?

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. We have made it clear, as have all parties in this House, that the principle of universal jurisdiction must be

non-negotiable but that the means by which arrest warrants can be obtained is not acceptable. In this case, leaders from a strategic partner and close friend of Britain have been prevented from entering the United Kingdom. It could of course have the same impact on leaders of other strategic partners and friends of this country. We are seeking a satisfactory remedy that maintains the principle of universal jurisdiction but ends the unintended consequence whereby an arrest warrant can be obtained by individuals in dubious circumstances.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that the Foreign Affairs Committee recently visited the west bank. We were not allowed to go to Gaza. We witnessed the creation of settlements that are causing physical apartheid and depriving many Palestinians of access to their land and therefore their livelihood. Exactly what pressure are the Government putting on the Israelis with regard to settlements?

Mr. Lewis: First, we should applaud the improvements that have been made on the west bank in security and economic development as a result of the leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. We should also applaud the removal of some checkpoints by the Israeli Government. Having said that, settlements are both illegal and an obstacle to peace in the middle east. We have constantly called for a total freeze on those settlements. Prime Minister Netanyahu's partial freeze is an important movement but we believe that settlement expansion is not acceptable in the context of the peace negotiations that we hope are about to get under way.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Is the Minister aware that the blockade of Gaza has already turned a coastal strip into a net importer of fish—just one example of the damage being done to Gazans and to their economy by the blockade? While condemning all the rocket attacks launched from Gaza into Israel, has the Minister conveyed to the Government of Israel that they should be ending the blockade of Gaza, not tightening it still further with the wall? Do the Government oppose the building of the wall?

Mr. Lewis: I think that I have answered the question. I said clearly that the Government at every opportunity make clear directly to Israel and in the context of international institutions that all obstacles to humanitarian assistance and the capacity of the Gazans to begin reconstruction should be removed. We equally make it clear at every opportunity to Hamas that the rocket attacks must stop and that Gilad Shalit should be released.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100302/debtext/100302-0001.htm#10030263000015>

Topical Questions

col 797 **Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks) (Con):** ... On the separate matter of the killing of Mr. al-Mabhouh in Dubai, the Foreign Secretary said to me in a letter last week that "if the Israelis had been responsible for this, the UK would have the strongest expectations that this would not happen again." I think the whole House will back him up in that. However, may I repeat a question that I have now asked Ministers twice? Did he specifically ask his Israeli counterpart for an assurance that Israel will never sanction the misuse of British passports in any future intelligence operation? Will he seek such an assurance, and does he have any expectation of receiving such an assurance?

David Miliband: Of course I make it clear, not just to Israel but to any country, that we have every expectation that no country, especially a friendly one, would interfere with British passports or promote their fraudulent use. I made that clear to the Israeli Foreign Minister, and I do so to anyone else who is considering such a course. The Israeli Foreign Minister insisted to me that he had no information that corroborated allegations of Israeli involvement, but I none the less made clear to him our very strong view that Israel should co-operate with the investigation that has been launched by the Serious Organised Crime Agency, and that, as I said clearly in my letter, we had every expectation that if there had been an occurrence such as this, it would never happen again.

col 798 T8. [319414] **Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP):** The Foreign Secretary has told us what the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr. Liberman, insisted to him. Does he believe Mr. Liberman, and does he expect the House to do so?

David Miliband: I certainly would not tell the rest of the House what to believe. However, I would say, very seriously, that an investigation is going on. It is right that while allegations fly around, we should wait until the conclusion of our investigation before coming to any conclusions.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100302/debtext/100302-0003.htm#10030263000026>

col 800 **Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op):** Checkpoints in west bank cities have been reduced from 41 to 14. How far is this responsible for economic progress on the west bank?

David Miliband: Obviously, the reduction in checkpoints is welcome. I have the latest figures for 2008 and 2009 for economic development in the west bank and I have discussed them with Prime Minister Fayyad recently. It is fair to say that although the reduction in checkpoints is welcome, the economic growth was secured before that reduction. We hope that the reduction in checkpoints will contribute to further economic growth in the years ahead.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife) (LD): Can the Foreign Secretary tell us what practical measures of co-operation are being offered by the Israeli Government to those conducting the investigation into the abuse of British passports? How would he characterise that co-operation?

David Miliband: I would say that it is premature to characterise the co-operation on a scale of one to 10, or nought to 10, but it is important that we send a clear message that we expect that full co-operation. The Serious Organised Crime Agency investigation is getting going, and is now spending some time in the middle east. For obvious reasons, I shall not give a running commentary on that investigation, but I take the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point seriously-I am sure that the House agrees-and we expect full co-operation with SOCA's work.

... col 802 **Mr. Andy Slaughter (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush) (Lab):** On 11 February, at least 17 children were arrested from the Al Jalazun refugee camp by Israeli forces in the middle of the night and allegedly suffered ill treatment, then and during interrogation. What representations has the Secretary of State made to the Israeli Government about the large number of Palestinian children held in custody and facing trial, if at all, by a military tribunal?

David Miliband: My hon. Friend, who I know follows these issues carefully, has raised related or similar issues with me before. As I said to him on those occasions, we raise very clearly with the Israelis and, I have to say, with the Palestinians, a range of human rights issues, including not only social and economic rights but security and the treatment of detainees. I do not know of the individual case that he raises, but I shall certainly look into it. It is important that the message goes out very clearly that we expect all sides to live up to their international, as well as domestic, obligations under international law.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100302/debtext/100302-0004.htm>

West Bank Checkpoints

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of progress in the removal of checkpoints from the west bank. [319397]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The UK welcomes Israel's easing of some restrictions on movement and access in the west bank as a step in the right direction. While recognizing Israel's legitimate security needs, we shall continue to urge the Israeli Government to reduce movement and access restrictions further.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100302/text/100302w0024.htm#1003039000004>

Gaza

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed the blockade of Gaza with his Israeli counterpart. [319402]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The UK is deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We continue to press the Israeli authorities to ease border restrictions further and to permit a greater flow of humanitarian aid, reconstruction materials, trade goods, and people into Gaza. This was most recently raised by the Secretary of State for International Development.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100302/text/100302w0024.htm#1003039000009>

Tzipi Livni

16. Ms Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the law in relation to universal jurisdiction, with particular reference to the case of Tzipi Livni. [319398]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have discussed the law in relation to universal jurisdiction, and in particular the case of Tzipi Livni, with Israeli Ministers. I have also received correspondence from a number of non-governmental groups. Government officials have also been asked for information on the UK's position by US and EU counterparts.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100302/text/100302w0024.htm#1003039000005>

UK Ministerial Statement

EU General and Foreign Affairs Councils

includes:

AOB: Dubai/passports

Ministers agreed a statement on the killing of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai on 20 January. It condemned the fact that those involved in the operation had used passports and credit cards which had been fraudulently acquired through the theft of EU citizens' identities. The Government strongly support the statement. The Foreign Secretary said that the EU needed to think hard about how it could promote peace and stability in the region, because the longer this was left unaddressed, the greater the risk of individual incidents such as this spilling over.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100302/wmstext/100302m0001.htm#10030256000011>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Foreign Secretary's interview on Hardtalk, BBC News

Interviewer: We saw a senior Hamas official killed, murdered, in Dubai. In principle do you believe that was to be condemned?

David Miliband: We have supported strongly the EU statement that said this was in no way conducive to stability in the Middle East, that in no way could it be condoned. And so at every stage we've been clear about our position. There are obviously different issues raised in Afghanistan Pakistan where you've got rules of the international law of armed conflict at play, but I think it's been very clear what the whole of Europe thinks about this. It's also clear that the use of British passports by another country, and again we're at the stage of allegations rather than fact, but any country ...

Interviewer: Well we know which country is involved with the passport story, it's Israel because all the British citizens whose passport identities were stolen were British Israelis, I mean ... we've got an investigation going on at the moment as to who was

behind the fraudulent use of British passports because over a dozen British passports seem to have been used in a fraudulent way, completely contrary to the way in which we run our passport system, and that's a very serious issue, as is the question of stability in the Middle East.

Interviewer: Just on that point you had a meeting with your Israeli counterpart, Avigdor Lieberman, not so long ago in Brussels. Mr Lieberman apparently said to you he had no information to give you. Is that acceptable?

David Miliband: Well that's what he said to me and I said in return that this was an issue that was far from trivial, it was extremely serious, and I said we had, the Prime Minister here had set up an independent investigation by the Serious Organised Crimes Agency and I expected full cooperation by the Israeli authorities.

Interviewer: To put it bluntly the Israelis are playing us for fools aren't they?

David Miliband: Well no, I certainly don't think they've, they certainly don't think ...

Interviewer: I mean when he says he has no information do you really believe that?

David Miliband: They don't, they don't think, well what I say at every stage is that we proceed on the basis of fact and evidence. And he chose his words, the words that he used, and I choose my words carefully ... what I've said in the House of Commons just this afternoon is that on a scale of nought to ten I'm not yet ready to give marks for how, the degree of cooperation that we're getting but we expect cooperation with the investigation that's been established. I'm also not going to lose sight of the wider Middle Eastern dimension to this. The last time I did this programme a year ago we talked about the window of opportunity for a two state ... solution closing. And my goodness, the dangers of that two state solution closing are profound indeed. This country has stood very firm for a long time for a two state solution, for Jerusalem as the capital of both states, for a resolution based on 1967 borders, for a fair settlement for the refugees, and we have to devote every ounce of energy to maintaining the space for that to be achieved.

Interviewer: How disappointed are you then that the Obama Administration walked away from the demand for a complete and total settlement freeze for the Israeli Government?

David Miliband: Well they've, they, they've not actually walked away from it. President Obama, Secretary Clinton have reiterated their, the US commitment in that respect and what we need to see ...

Interviewer: ... is that not stretching the truth? ...

David Miliband: Well, well, no with, with great respect you're the one who's stretching the truth. You said that the American Administration were walking away from their demand ... that Israel lives up to the Road Map obligation for a total freeze. They have not walked away from it. They have reiterated that that remains the policy of the American Government. What they've said though is that they have not been able to get the Israeli Government to agree that and they want to start proximity talks in any case. That is not walking away from the commitments or the policies that they've got, it's recognising that they haven't yet been able to achieve them.

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=Speech&id=21830062>

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Relevant Legislation ** New or updated

UK Parliament

Children, Schools and Families Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/childrenschoolsandfamilies.html>

**** Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/constitutionalreformandgovernance.html>

Financial motion

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100302/debtext/100302-0005.htm#10030263000003>

Report Stage, House of Commons

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100302/debtext/100302-0008.htm#10030263000002>

Report Stage Proceedings

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmbills/068/pro0680203p.291-297.html>

**** Crime and Security Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/crimeandsecurity.html>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmbills/073/amend/pbc0730203a.1205-1209.html>

**** Equality Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/equality.html>

Report Stage, House of Lords

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/100302-0002.htm#10030266000746>

and

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/100302-0014.htm#100302106000548>

Bill as amended on Report

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldbills/039/2010039.pdf>

Flood and Water Management Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/floodandwatermanagement.html>

Scottish Parliament

End of Life Assistance Bill

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/38-EndLifeAssist/index.htm>

Draft Census Order

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/ssi2010/draft/pdf/sdsi_9780111007907_en.pdf

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Consultations

** new or updated

Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Order 2010
(closes 15 March 2010)

http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/consultations/6605.aspx

2011 Census Statistical Outputs (England and Wales) (closes 26 March 2010)
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/consultations/open-consultations/2011-output-consultation---main-statistical-outputs/index.html>

Equality Bill: Draft Codes of Conduct (closes 2 April 2010)
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legislative-framework/equality-bill/equality-bill-codes-of-practice-consultation/#1>

Equality Bill: Draft Guidance (closes 16 April 2010)
<http://ehrc-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal>

Death Certification, Burial, and Cremation (Scotland) (closes 21 April 2010)
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/300112/0093686.pdf>

Humanitarian Assistance Strategic Guidance (closes 14 May)
http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/consultations/HA_strategic_guide_draft.pdf

2011 Census Statistical Outputs (Scotland) (closes 14 May 2010)
<http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/census/censushm2011/preparations/consultation-and-research/formal-consultations/spring-10-consultation.html>

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