

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community
 Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
 SCoJeC

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<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06972/SN06972.pdf>

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Israel

Westminster Hall Debate

Hezbollah's Rocket Arsenal: Southern Lebanon

col 170WH Philip Hollobone: ... I called the debate because on the northern border of one of our closest allies, Israel, there is a rocket arsenal of up to 150,000 missiles aimed at all its major towns and cities, and something should be done about that. In the debate, I will rely heavily on a superb report by the High Level Military Group, "Hizballah's terror army: how to prevent a third Lebanon war", which was published in October. ...

The report gives us a stark warning: "The last war between Hizballah and Israel in 2006 was a severe blow to the terrorist group. But since then, Hizballah has been able to recover militarily, amassing a huge stockpile of weapons, developing and fielding new and more precise and lethal systems, and gaining combat experience fighting for Iran and...in Syria."

Stephen Crabb (Conservative): On the subject of Hezbollah being a terrorist organisation, does my hon. Friend share my view that the distinction that we choose to make on our side—that there is a military and a civil wing to Hezbollah—is entirely artificial and that Hezbollah sees itself as a unified terrorist military organisation?

Philip Hollobone: Yes. Not only do my right hon. Friend and I agree that there is no distinction, but so does Hezbollah. In October 2012 its Deputy Secretary General, Sheikh Naim Qassem, said: "We don't have a military wing and a political one; we don't have Hezbollah on one hand and the resistance party on the other... Every element of Hezbollah, from commanders to members as well as our various capabilities, are in the service of the resistance, and we have nothing but the resistance as a priority."

John Howell (Conservative): ... at a protest outside the Israeli embassy in Kensington in July, Israeli flags were burned and Hezbollah flags were waved with impunity. Does

my hon. Friend agree that that sends a signal of lauding a terrorist organisation that should infuriate all British people?

Philip Hollobone: I agree ... We will probably see more flag burning this Sunday at the al-Quds demonstration in London. ... It is frankly a disgrace that Hezbollah can parade on the streets of London. ...

col 171WH **Mark Harper (Conservative):** ... When it is challenged about being a proscribed military organisation, it effectively has some small print at the bottom of the flag that says it is the civilian wing, and the police are then not empowered to do anything about the march. Does my hon. Friend think that issue should be tackled?

Philip Hollobone: Yes, I absolutely agree ...

Jack Lopresti (Conservative): ... drawing attention to the financial backers of Hezbollah and Hamas—the Iranians—whose mission seems to be to create mayhem, chaos and murder in the middle east, should we not send a message, as strongly as possible, that Iran's malign and wicked influence in the region is a threat to peace and we will not tolerate it?

Philip Hollobone: I agree ...

Ross Thomson (Conservative): Does my hon. Friend agree that support for terrorist proxies, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, poses a serious threat to Israel and its borders? ...

col 172WH **Philip Hollobone:** ... It is not just Israel that is under threat, but Saudi Arabia. ...

Hezbollah seeks to violently impose its totalitarian ideology on Muslims and forge a radical, Iranian-style Islamic state in Lebanon in its determination to destroy Israel and drive out western and other non-Islamic influences from the Muslim world.

The Hezbollah leader is known for his venomous, anti-Semitic rhetoric and has called repeatedly for the destruction of the state of Israel. Hezbollah is linked to a history of international terror attacks. It now has de facto control of Lebanon's Government and boasts the country's largest military infrastructure, including up to an estimated 150,000 Iranian-supplied rockets capable of striking anywhere in Israel. ...

col 173WH Hezbollah's rocket arsenal has only one purpose and that is to threaten Israel. Israel has no territorial ambitions in southern Lebanon at all. ...

Another problem is that this rocket arsenal is not all lined up on the border, so that everyone can see it; it is embedded in more or less every Shi'ite village located in southern Lebanon. Effectively, therefore, Hezbollah is using the population of southern Lebanon as a human shield ...

My big ask to the Minister is that we need to use our good offices in the United Nations to strengthen UNIFIL's mandate, so that it can proactively disarm Hezbollah's rocket arsenal. ...

col 174WH We can also play a part ... by banning Hezbollah in its entirety and proscribing it as a terrorist organisation ...

Hezbollah is the most destabilising factor within Lebanon itself. It has now become a state within a state, and it has built up a massive rocket arsenal that threatens one of our closest allies. ...

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): ... reports suggest that Hezbollah could now indeed have as many as 100,000 rockets, including hundreds of advanced rockets with a range of up to 300 km. That is deeply concerning and a clear threat to the stability of the region. ...

... Hezbollah is also in direct violation of UN Security Council resolutions 1559 and 1701, which my hon. Friend mentioned and which stated that there should be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than those of the Lebanese state ...

col 175WH **Jim Shannon (DUP):** The Minister mentioned the 130,000 to 150,000 rockets. Is he also aware of the 50,000 soldiers, including reservists, that Hezbollah has? Does he agree that Israelis are entitled to be concerned about the relationship between

Lebanon and the Hezbollah terrorists? ...

Alistair Burt: ... Hezbollah is a dangerous and destabilising force. It sits on the northern border of Israel. Israel has every right to be concerned and to seek support in relation to dealing with that. ...

I should add that Israeli overflights of Lebanon also violate UN Security Council resolution 1701 and contribute to increased tension in the area. The activity by Hezbollah risks triggering a conflict between Hezbollah and Israel on a scale far beyond that seen during the 2006 war. ...

Stephen Crabb: ... was [the Minister] drawing an equivalence between Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory and Hezbollah's stockpile of 150,000 rockets?

Alistair Burt: No, not at all, and I would not seek to do so. ...

The UK proscribed Hezbollah's external security organisation in 2001. In light of Hezbollah's support for militant groups such as Jaysh al-Mahdi, which was responsible for attacks on British troops in Iraq, we extended the proscription in 2008 to include Hezbollah's military wing, including its jihad council and all units reporting to it.

col 176WH We are working with our European partners to challenge Hezbollah's malign activities ...

Mark Harper: ... I genuinely do not understand why we make the distinction in the way we do between the military arm and the non-military arm. ...

Alistair Burt: The distinction has been drawn for some time. We recognise Hezbollah as a political entity in Lebanon in an exceptionally complex Government structure ...

Ross Thomson: ... By proscribing Hezbollah, we would send the strongest possible message that the UK abhors terrorism in all its forms.

Alistair Burt: ... We maintain that the best way for the UK to help to tackle Hezbollah and its weapons and to support Israel is threefold. The first part is to support UNIFIL ... The second is to support the defence of the state of Israel ... The third is to strengthen and empower the Lebanese state ...

col 178WH Hezbollah's actions and the reported size of its weapons arsenal are deeply concerning to the United Kingdom and a threat to stability in an already fragile region. The best way to tackle both those things is a secure and stable Lebanon with strong institutions, a professional army that inspires the trust of its people, and a Government who protect Lebanon from wider instability. We stand ready to support Lebanon in upholding these values and addressing the challenges it faces and to support those threatened by Hezbollah. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-06-06/debates/F5454329-8C08-4A36-839D-93CBE4DED2BD/Hezbollah%E2%80%99SRocketArsenalSouthernLebanon>

The report referred to above can be read at

<http://www.high-level-military-group.org/pdf/hlmq-hizballahs-terror-army.pdf>

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

The following two questions both received the same answer

Catherine West (Labour) [148986] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether his Department holds information on the number of (a) Palestinian (i) civilians and (ii) militants and (b) Israeli (i) civilians and (ii) militants killed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the last year.

Catherine West (Labour) [148987] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether his Department holds information on the number of (a) Palestinian (i) civilians and (ii) militants and (b) Israeli (i) civilians and (ii) militants wounded in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the last year.

Alistair Burt: Public reports suggest that from June 2017 until 4 June 2018, 6 Israelis, 2 of them soldiers, and over 190 Palestinians have been killed. The British Government does not compile an independent assessment of whether those killed could be classified as civilians or militants. We call on the relevant authorities to ensure that any incident involving loss of life is investigated thoroughly and transparently.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-06-01/148986/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-06-01/148987/>

Israel: Arms Trade

Paul Sweeney (Labour Co-op) [149035] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of whether any arms licensed for export from the UK to Israel over the last three years have been used by the Israeli authorities in their policing of the Gaza border in recent weeks.

Alistair Burt: The Government takes its defence exports responsibilities extremely seriously and we have been keeping the situation in Israel under review. We have no information to suggest that UK supplied equipment has been used in contravention of the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-06-01/149035/>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Borders

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL8089] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the reply by the Minister of State for the Middle East on 15 May (HC Deb, col 138) confirming the Government's support for Israel's right to defend its borders, what they consider Israel's borders to be.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is clear that we support Israel's right to defend its borders from attack. We distinguish between the State of Israel within the 1948 armistice lines and the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. We are also clear that the permanent borders between Israel and a future Palestinian state should be based on pre-1967 lines with equal land swaps to reflect the national, security, and religious interests of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples. The final status of these borders must be determined by the parties as part of a negotiated two-state solution.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-21/HL8089/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-05-15/debates/D6170F50-D03A-40D8-B257-5C2A55493561/GazaBorderViolence#contribution-60D7855F-0A25-4892-AC8A-12A5179EB3EE>

Gaza: Israel

Baroness Uddin (Non-affiliated) [HL8202] To ask Her Majesty's Government for what reasons they abstained from voting on the resolution of the United Nations Human Rights Council held on 18 May, calling for an independent investigation into recent violence in Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We abstained on calls for a Commission of Inquiry into recent violence in Gaza because the substance of the resolution was not

impartial and balanced. We could not support an investigation that refused to explicitly examine the action of non-state actors such as Hamas. An investigation of this kind would not provide us with a comprehensive assessment of accountability. However, the UK continues to fully support the need for an independent and transparent investigation into recent events. We call directly on Israel to carry out a transparent inquiry into the Israeli Defense Forces' conduct at the border fence and to demonstrate how this will achieve a sufficient level of independence. We believe this investigation should include international members. We urge that the findings of such an investigation be made public and if, wrongdoing is found, that those responsible are held to account. The Foreign Secretary stressed the importance of Israel conducting an independent investigation when he spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16 May.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-23/HL8202/>

Gaza: Israel

Baroness Uddin (Non-affiliated) [HL8204] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the United Nations Human Rights Council's resolution of 18 May that the use of force by Israel in Gaza was disproportionate and indiscriminate.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is concerned about the high number of deaths and casualties during protests in Gaza, including the volume of live fire used. The Foreign Secretary, the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa and I have all raised the use of force with Israeli authorities. The Foreign Secretary spoke to both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas on 16 May, where he encouraged them to call for calm and work to de-escalate the situation. There is an urgent need to establish the facts; the UK continues to fully support the need for an independent and transparent investigation into recent events. We call directly on Israel to carry out a transparent inquiry into the Israeli Defense Forces' conduct at the border fence and to demonstrate how this will achieve a sufficient level of independence.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-23/HL8204/>

UK Parliament Ministerial Statement

Foreign Affairs Council

[HCWS738] ... Ministers discussed the situation in Gaza and the US embassy in Israel's move to Jerusalem. Ministers agreed on the need to act immediately to avoid further loss of life, including by improving humanitarian access. They also stressed the importance of a political process, and re-confirmed the united EU position on the need to find a two-state solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states. ...

To read the full statement see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-06-06/debates/18060652000005/ForeignAffairsCouncil>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Gregory Campbell (DUP) (1346) Save a Child's Heart Charity – That this House congratulates the Save a Child's Heart charity based in Israel, which has been named an institutional winner of this year's 2018 United Nations Population Award; acknowledges the tremendous work done in saving the lives of thousands of children, many from Africa, South America, Europe, Asia, and throughout the Middle East including Palestine, who

suffer from heart disease; and expresses the hope that this charity will receive continuing support and recognition in the years to come.

<https://www.parliament.uk/edm/2017-19/1346>

Downing Street

PM meeting with Israeli Prime Minister

A Downing Street spokesperson said: The Prime Minister held a bilateral meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at Downing Street earlier today.

They discussed Iran, where the Prime Minister reiterated our firm commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as the best way of preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

They agreed on the need to counter Iran's destabilising activity in the region, including in Syria, and Iran's proliferation of ballistic missiles.

On Syria, they agreed on the importance of seeing the conflict and deep humanitarian suffering brought to an end, and of preserving stability in other countries in the region.

The Prime Minister told Prime Minister Netanyahu that she was deeply concerned by recent rocket attacks from Gaza and, as a friend of Israel, reiterated the UK's support for Israel's right to self-defence. She said the Palestinians had a right to protest but it was important that these protests be peaceful. She said there was, however, concern about the scale of casualties in Gaza in recent weeks, and around Israel's use of live fire.

The Prime Minister noted the importance of seeing the situation in Gaza swiftly alleviated and parties moving back towards direct negotiations for a two-state solution.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-israeli-prime-minister-6-june-2018>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Foreign Secretary meets Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

... The Foreign Secretary condemned incitement and rocket fire against Israel. He reiterated the need for Israel to carry out a transparent, independent inquiry into the loss of more than 120 Palestinian lives during the recent Gaza protests, as well as over 10,000 injuries, with approximately 4,000 of these as a result of live gun fire.

He stressed the UK's firm commitment to a two-state solution as the best way to bring about stability and peace in the region.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said: The UK, alongside France and Germany, firmly believes that the Iran nuclear deal is the best way to ensure a safe, secure future for the region.

We are committed to making sure Iran continues to abide by its obligations under the deal and are in full agreement with Israel that we must prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

We are also very concerned by the deaths of over 120 Palestinians in recent weeks and the deteriorating situation in Gaza. The people of Israel and Gaza have the right to live safely in peace, without constant fear for their security.

We continue to press both Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the need to refrain from actions which make peace more difficult. Settlement construction is a significant barrier to achieving this goal, as are terrorism, incitement to violence, and the refusal by some to acknowledge Israel's right to exist.

The UK has an unwavering commitment to Israel's security and stability and we look forward to continuing to work together to achieve our common goals.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-meets-israeli-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu>

Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

Culture and Tourism Industries (Ethnic Discrimination)

5. Ivan McKee (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on organisations in the culture and tourism industries that discriminate on the basis of ethnicity operating in Scotland. (S5O-02181)

The Minister for International Development and Europe (Alasdair Allan): Equality is at the heart of the Scottish Government's ambitions for a prosperous and fairer Scotland and is critical to how we meet the challenges and seize the opportunities that will allow us to thrive in the 21st century. We published the race equality action plan in December 2017, which outlines more than 120 actions that we will take over the course of this parliamentary session to secure better outcomes for ethnic minorities in Scotland.

Ivan McKee: The minister may be aware that Israeli airline Israir is commencing flights from Edinburgh to Tel Aviv shortly. Unfortunately, millions of people living in the area that the airline serves will be unable to board those flights at Edinburgh airport, solely on the basis of their ethnicity, because Palestinians living in the West Bank are not allowed to fly through Ben Gurion airport, unlike Jewish Israelis living in settlements next door to them. Does the minister agree that such discrimination on the basis of ethnicity has no place in modern Scotland?

Alasdair Allan: The Scottish Government would clearly deplore and condemn any institution or business that discriminated against its customers on the basis of their ethnicity, religion or nationality.

It is up to the United Kingdom Government to decide which airlines fly to the UK, but the Scottish Government's views about the rights of the people of Palestine are a matter of record, and they are views that are widely shared across the chamber.

John Finnie (Green): Can the minister confirm that the Scottish Government, through, for example, its enterprise agency or VisitScotland, will not support financially or otherwise businesses or organisations that operate within a system of apartheid, such as the one outlined by Ivan McKee?

Alasdair Allan: As I understand it, the flights in question are weekly inbound charter flights. It is not a service that is promoted directly to customers in Scotland and VisitScotland does not have a relationship with the airline in question.

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11581&i=104987#ScotParlOR>

The race equality plan referred to above can be read at
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00528746.pdf>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

European Union (Withdrawal) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/europeanunionwithdrawal.html>

Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/holocaustreturnofculturalobjectsamendment.html>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/organdonationdeemedconsent.html>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

Measures to further improve the effectiveness of the fight against illegal content online (closing date 25 June 2018)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-measures-further-improve-effectiveness-fight-against-illegal-content-online_en

Home Education (closing date 2 July 2018)

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/home-education-call-for-evidence-and-revised-dfe-a/>

Ecclesiastical exemption and guidance on scheduled monuments (closing date 13 July 2018)

<https://beta.gov.wales/ecclesiastical-exemption-and-guidance-scheduled-monuments>

Antisemitism: Survey of European Jews (closing date not stated)

<http://www.eurojews.eu/>

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438