



Joint letter to UK Foreign Secretary: UK rights groups call on UK government to end its support for Israel's unlawful use of force against Syria

Israel's attacks on Syria and its ongoing military operations there are unquestionably unlawful and must not be portrayed otherwise, says a group of human rights, humanitarian and legal organisations in the UK.

Israel has carried out [hundreds of airstrikes](#) across Syria since 8 December 2024, primarily targeting military facilities, and expanded ground operations beyond the Golan – illegally occupied by Israel since 1967 – seizing and occupying further Syrian territory. Israeli leaders have also stated their intention to [expand settlements](#) in the occupied Golan, despite the illegality of the occupation and of all such settlements.

A state's use of force on another state can only be justified on the condition of an actual or imminent armed attack from that state [Article 2(4) of the UN Charter] or if authorised by the UN Security Council. Given the absence of these justifications Israel's use of force is unlawful. Moreover, the scale and severity of the attacks are serious and arguably constitute aggression.

The UK government risks further undermining international law by not only refusing to condemn Israel's unlawful acts but by – in statements of the [Foreign Secretary](#) and other [cabinet ministers](#) – appearing to support them, including Israel's protracted illegal occupation of the Golan.

In contrast to Foreign Secretary Lammy's statement, the [UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counterterrorism](#) explicitly stated that he “condemn(s) Israel's hundreds of aggressive attacks on Syrian military installations on the pretext of countering terrorism. International law does not permit the preventive disarmament of a foreign state's military absent any armed attack by that country.”

Israel's attacks have occurred in the wake of the collapse of the Assad regime, with Syria in a time of transition, vulnerable to further military shocks and ensuing destabilisation. The transitional government is in need of international assistance to quickly put in place a legitimate government accepted by all Syrians that leads the country to a better future, and ensures accountability for past crimes. Israel's destruction of Syrian military bases and facilities, including chemical weapons production and storage facilities, will also destroy evidence needed to prosecute perpetrators of crimes including chemical weapons use and human rights abuses, as well as documentation regarding attacks on civilians and civilian objects, making transitional justice as part of rebuilding Syria harder to achieve. It will also

impede evidence gathering by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in line with its UN mandate.

There is a high risk that UK-made parts and technology have been involved in Israel's attacks on Syria. Given recent and ongoing patterns of deployment, F-16 and F-35 bomber jets are likely to have conducted manned airstrikes on Syria. Every F-35 contains UK-made parts, some F-16 models are known to contain UK-made parts while other F-16 models are likely to contain them. UK-made parts and technology may also be in drones, targeting equipment, tanks, ammunition and other Israeli equipment used in its unlawful operations in Syria.

Under domestic and international law obligations, the UK must not transfer arms or components to a state when there is a clear risk that they may be used to carry out or facilitate serious violations of international law.

Human rights, humanitarian and legal organisations in the UK have [repeatedly challenged](#) the current and previous UK government for failing to adequately promote or uphold international and domestic law in the context of policies regarding Israel and Israel's military operations across the occupied Palestinian territory, [Lebanon](#), and now Syria. There is a chasm between the current government's stated intention to be the government of international law and its actual conduct and statements. In this context, all UK arms transfers that risk being used in violations of international law in Syria by any party should be reviewed to ensure compliance with UK domestic and international law.

With regards Israel's ongoing aggression against Syria, our UK-based organisations call on the UK government to: immediately condemn Israel's unlawful attacks on Syria; demand that Israel withdraws all of its armed forces from and ends its unlawful presence in Syria; impose a comprehensive suspension all direct and indirect arms transfers to Israel; take concrete steps in line with positions of the International Court of Justice and with the Genocide Convention to stop Israel's genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza and to end Israel's unlawful occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Signatories

War on Want

International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP)

Global Legal Action Network

Council for Arab British Understanding

Campaign Against Arms Trade

Action for Humanity

Global Justice Now