

## Policy Snapshot

# Potential relocation of UK Embassy to Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem

### What's the issue?

**Relocating the UK embassy would represent a break from long-held international consensus and a clear endorsement of Israel's extensive and ongoing violations of international law - thereby severely compromising the safety of Palestinians, the credibility of the UK on the international stage, and the prospect of any kind of just future in the region.**

Jerusalem has been the economic, cultural and political centre of Palestinian society for centuries. Many Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homes in the western part of the city during the Nakba and creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Since occupying the eastern part of the city in 1967, successive Israeli governments have enacted a host of policies aimed at erasing the Palestinian Christian and Muslim identity of the city, which the international community has roundly condemned.

The proposal to relocate the UK embassy comes at a time when more than 100 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces in East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied West Bank since the beginning of 2022, making it the deadliest year in nearly a decade. These figures do not include Palestinians in Gaza, where thousands of women, men and children have been killed during repeated military bombardments over several years - with the latest assault in August killing 17 children.

### What's the UK position?

- The UK, along with the vast majority of the international community, has always upheld a policy not to recognise Israeli attempts to “alter the character and status of Jerusalem”. Following Israel’s illegal annexation of East Jerusalem through a “basic law” in 1980, the UN Security Council Resolution “censure[d]” this move “in the strongest terms”, called on all Member states “not to recognise the “basic law””, and for “[t]hose States that have established diplomatic missions at Jerusalem to withdraw such missions from the Holy City” ([UNSCR 478](#))
- At a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid in September 2022, former Prime Minister Liz Truss confirmed that her government would consider moving the UK embassy to Jerusalem.
- During the initial Conservative leadership contest in August, Rishi Sunak made similar overtures at a Conservative Friends of Israel hustings, saying that he saw “a very strong case” for relocating the embassy.
- Thus far, the only major state to break from consensus on this issue was the US under former President Donald Trump. In October this year, Australia reversed a decision to recognise West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, regretting former PM Scott Morrison’s decision to ‘[play politics](#)’.
- After confirming the review, Truss faced backlash from a wide range of direct stakeholders, as well as foreign policy experts, diplomats, MPs, faith leaders, NGOs and community groups urging her to reconsider the decision and abide by the UK's international obligations.
- Labour, Liberal Democrat, and SNP spokespeople have confirmed they oppose any embassy move.

## Why does it matter?

Relocating the British Embassy would:

- Further embolden Israel to continue its project of systemic disruption and erasure of Palestinian cultural and political life in Jerusalem, including “residency” revocations, discriminatory planning laws, forced expulsions (in areas such as Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan), home demolitions and others.
- Effectively endorse Israel’s policies and practices across the entirety of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, which meet the legal definition of apartheid, according to an extensive and ever-growing international body of evidence.
- Represent a flagrant disregard of international law and consensus on the part of the UK by effectively recognising Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem, including its unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem.
- Sharpen the asymmetry of power, taking all parties further from the prospect of a just future.
- Threaten regional relationships in the Middle East, given the significance of Jerusalem within the wider Arab world.
- Risk the long-term credibility of the UK on the international stage, particularly due to double standards in the application of international law, and historical responsibility concerning Britain’s own colonial legacy in Palestine.

## What can British policymakers do?

1. Put pressure on the government to halt any review process.
2. Ensure that the government is aware of the political implications and repercussions of the embassy move, its breach of international law and the UK’s international obligations.
3. Urge action in line with the UK’s international obligations to implement appropriate consequences for human rights abuses and violations of international law.
4. Take proactive steps to consult meaningfully with Palestinians, including British Palestinians, regarding this and other policy decisions which stand to directly impact them.

## Where can I learn more?

[If Liz Truss does this in Israel, it will have far-reaching consequences](#), Independent, Oct 2022

[What would a UK embassy move to Jerusalem mean for Palestine?](#), Al Jazeera, Oct 2022

[Liz Truss under pressure to drop ‘reckless’ UK Israel embassy move](#), Financial Times, Oct 2022

*The British Palestinian Committee is an independent organisation working to ensure that British Palestinian perspectives are integral to public discourse and policy making on Palestine.*

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