

As a strong supporter of the State of Israel, I celebrate the UK's record trade ties and flourishing partnership in medicine, technology, academia with the country. I may not always be in agreement with the actions of its government, but that does not detract from the fact that Israel is the only true democracy in the region and a strong bilateral partner to the UK.

At the same time, I am proud to be a friend of the Palestinian people. I look forward to the day when the Palestinian people can enjoy the security of a sovereign state upon the successful conclusion of a negotiated two-state solution. This will require difficult compromises from the leaders of both parties, but it remains achievable.

Reassuringly, polling in August 2016 conducted jointly by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) has shown that there is still an appetite for a two-state solution amongst both Palestinians and Israelis, with 59% of Israelis and 51% of Palestinians supportive.

Calls to boycott, divest from and sanction the State of Israel have been unequivocally condemned by the Conservative Government, and our Prime Minister has made clear that such attempts to demonise the only Jewish state are unacceptable.

On the issue of settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the construction of settlements is regarded as illegal by the Government and it is an issue that requires urgent addressing. However, while I believe settlement expansion to be counter-productive, they should not be considered a permanent obstacle to peace. Not only does Israel have a history of unilaterally removing settlements in the interests of peace, but both parties accept that any future final status agreement will include equivalent land swaps.

Indeed, in December 2016, a No. 10 spokesperson said that settlements are "far from the only problem in this conflict", and that "in particular, the people of Israel deserve to live free from the threat of terrorism, with which they have had to cope for too long".

Since seizing power in 2007, the Hamas leadership has favoured the destruction of Israel over the wellbeing of its own people, and in the past Hamas has misappropriated massive amounts of aid and imported goods for use in its terrorist infrastructure, including rockets and terror tunnels. In view of the threat posed by a Hamas and other Gaza-based terror groups, the 2011 United Nations Palmer Report concluded that Israel's blockade of Gaza was both legal and appropriate.

Despite the security risks posed, Israel is actively working to support reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip following Operation Protective Edge (2014), significantly easing restrictions on the movement of goods and people in and out of the Gaza Strip since the conflict.

Sadly, many Palestinian children have committed acts of terrorism which have in the past killed and severely injured Israelis, including throwing rocks at cars and Molotov cocktails. Regarding child detention, Israel has made significant amendments to security legislation with the aim of further promoting and protecting the legal rights of minors during criminal proceedings before the West Bank military justice system.

The reform process is ongoing, with the relevant legislative provisions and operational practices constantly under review.

The Prime Minister and the Conservative Party are clear: The resumption of direct peace talks is the only way to revive the Middle East Peace Process, and achieve the two-state solution that we all want to see.

Yours sincerely,

Jack

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