

# Prince William visit seeks to reinforce Britain's ties with Israel

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2 July 2018

The British and Israeli media hailed as “historic” the visit by Prince William, second in line to the throne, to the Middle East. He met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Jordanian royal family and Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas.

The royal staff were at pains to emphasise that the trip was “strictly non-political,” focused on the “people and culture of the region,” with its sightseeing and “meet the people” tours of Jordan, the West Bank and Syrian and Palestinian refugee camps. It was the first ever official visit by a British royal since Israel was founded in 1948. Yet there was no accounting as to why the decision to end this boycott was made.

One factor is undoubtedly attempts to groom William to replace his deeply unpopular father, Charles, as the ageing Queen’s immediate heir. So too is Britain’s increasing isolation following the shock 2016 vote to leave the European Union. Under conditions of growing trade war and protectionism, the government has targeted Israel as one of 10 countries with which it is trying to sign new bilateral free trade and investment agreements. Bilateral trade of goods rose from \$7.2 billion in 2016 to \$9.1 billion in 2017, plus an additional \$1.6 billion for trade in services in 2015. Following the Brexit referendum, Israeli investment in the UK rose from £114 million to £154 million.

More fundamentally, as the Israeli media boasted, the future monarch’s trip was a boost for Israel’s international legitimacy. It came just weeks after the slaughter of more than 120 Palestinians—including 12 children, two journalists and a paramedic—and injuries to another 12,600 during the weeks of protests that started March 30 demanding the right of return to their homes and villages. The Israel Defence Forces unleashed live bullets, teargas and rubber bullets against unarmed protesters, who posed no threat to Israel or its border fence. There was not one Israeli casualty.

Despite some handwringing, Britain failed to condemn Israel or propose any sanctions against it. It has not opposed Israel’s illegal blockage of Gaza, merely calling on Israel to ease its restrictions on the besieged enclave. Neither has it

reviewed the export of British arms, aircraft components, drones and military materiel to Israel that have totalled \$445 million since Tel Aviv’s 2014 war on Gaza that were undoubtedly used in the Gaza massacres.

When questioned in Parliament in April about Israel’s use of British-supplied arms against the Palestinians, Foreign Minister Alastair Burt either refused to answer or gave the standard, meaningless mantras about “following procedures.” Britain abstained in the vote at the UN Human Rights Council to establish a commission of inquiry into Israel’s criminal actions against unarmed and defenceless Palestinians in Gaza, in favour of Israel carrying out its own inquiry that would—if carried out at all—inevitably be a whitewash.

In March, the Board of Deputies of British Jews praised the UK for voting against two UNHCR resolutions critical of Israel, while the watchdog, UN Watch, noted that this was a pattern begun in 2016 of switching to active opposition to the bodies’ treatment of Israeli crimes as opposed to yes votes or abstentions.

Prime Minister Theresa May gushed that Israel was “one of the world’s great success stories” and a “beacon of tolerance.” Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson called the UK-Israel relationship the “cornerstone of so much of what we do in the Middle East” and has described Israel as a “light unto the nations” whose relationship with the UK “is underpinned by a shared sense of values: justice, compassion, tolerance.”

Such statements must be set in the context of Britain’s role in the establishment of the Israeli state via the infamous Balfour Declaration of November 1917 that pledged Britain’s support for a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. The Declaration was a sordid deal made over the heads of the inhabitants of Palestine in pursuit of Britain’s imperialist war aims. It launched a nakedly colonial project that was to set in motion the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, regional wars between Israel and its Arab neighbours and the rupture of the entire Middle East.

From Britain’s perspective, the project backfired,

provoking a hostile response from the Palestinians and Arab leaders and prejudicing its broader geostrategic interests in the region. Britain not only abstained in the vote on the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan, it also repeatedly refused to support Israel's membership of the UN, only recognizing it in April 1950.

Relations warmed, however, with Britain and France working with Israel in the 1956 Suez operation attempting to unseat Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser and regain possession of the Suez Canal. They became even closer as the UK's declining economic and political position made it ever more dependent upon US imperialism, which has since the 1967 war—when Israel demonstrated its military superiority over its Arab neighbours—used Israel as its local gendarme to guard its interests in the Middle East, suppress the Palestinian and Arab working class and maintain its local stooges in power.

This has intensified since the liquidation of the Soviet Union in 1990 by the Stalinist bureaucracy, with US imperialism launching a series of disastrous neo-colonial interventions—supported by Britain—in a bid to establish its global hegemony. The Syrian Civil War—facilitated by the US, UK, Israel, Jordan and others—and Washington's increasing bellicosity against Russia and Iran, has consolidated these relations.

This became more marked still with the return in 2015 of a Conservative government, viewed as friendlier to Israel than the Labour Party.

The past few years have seen vicious efforts directed by the Israeli embassy in London against leader Jeremy Corbyn on bogus allegations of anti-Semitism—the purpose of which is to suppress any criticism of Israel and its sponsors.

The veil was lifted on the close and covert relations between Britain and Israel when then International Development Secretary Priti Patel met several senior Israeli politicians, including Netanyahu, while supposedly on a family holiday in Israel. The meetings were so extensive they could only have been carried out with the participation of Whitehall.

Last year, the Royal Air Force (RAF) carried out joint exercises with the Israel Air Force (IAF), the first time such an exercise was made public. In November, HMS Ocean, the fleet flagship of the Royal Navy, docked in Haifa as part of a visit marking Israel's active partnership with NATO. In April, the RAF joined Poland, Austria, Greece, Italy and Canada in the IAF's traditional flyover for Israel's 70th anniversary celebrations over Israel's coast line.

Israel has long sought an official senior royal visitor, but the Foreign Office previously refused to give its consent in accordance with its long-standing policy that there would be no official royal visit without significant progress on an

Israeli-Palestinian deal. London now considers there is no longer a valid reason to refuse to sanction such a visit, after Washington effectively buried talk of “reconciliation” under the so-called two-state solution. This was made clear by US President Donald Trump's decision to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Prince William and his entourage were at pains to present Britain as honest brokers in the vacuum created by Trump's provocative moves which the UK voted against in the UN. But this is yet more duplicity. His Royal Highness's visit was a very visible signal of Britain's endorsement of these actions and of the arch-criminal Netanyahu himself.

Prince William made a point of calling on Netanyahu and his wife Sara, who had just been indicted with fraud and breach of trust over the alleged misuse of state funds to pay for \$100,000 worth of meals at the prime minister's official residence. Benjamin Netanyahu is under criminal investigation in three separate cases, with police saying they have enough evidence to indict him on charges of fraud, bribery and breach of trust.

The government also breached its rule that no British representative should officially visit East Jerusalem, the West Bank or the Golan Heights—which Israel has illegally occupied since the 1967 war—allowing William to visit East Jerusalem's Old City and Ramallah in the West Bank. The Foreign Office even sanctioned his stay at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, the British government's headquarters in Palestine that was blown up in 1947 by the Irgun, a terrorist outfit—killing 91 people, among them Britons, Arabs and Jews, and injuring many more. The Irgun was led by Menachem Begin who became prime minister of Israel in 1977.

Britain's revisiting the scene of its historic crimes is to prepare and legitimise new ones. It indicates it is ready to support the Trump administration's attempt to force the PA to accept a formal accommodation with Israel based on a renunciation of the Palestinians' right of return to their homes from which they fled or were driven out in 1948-9 and 1967.



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