

British government to send surveillance planes to facilitate Israel's genocide

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On Saturday, Britain's Ministry of Defence (MoD) said that the Royal Air Force (RAF) would carry out surveillance flights over Gaza.

A joint statement by the Ministry of Defence, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, and Home Office, headed "UK military activity in the Eastern Mediterranean", announced, "In support of the ongoing hostage rescue activity, the Ministry of Defence will conduct surveillance flights over the eastern Mediterranean, including operating in air space over Israel and Gaza."

The statement claimed that the "Surveillance aircraft will be unarmed, do not have a combat role, and will be tasked solely to locate hostages. Only information relating to hostage rescue will be passed to the relevant authorities responsible for hostage rescue."

Britain has been up to its neck in the arming of the Israeli regime that has killed tens of thousands, mainly civilians and the vast majority women and children, and reduced Gaza to rubble. Now everyone is expected to believe that the RAF will be carrying out blanket surveillance of Gaza and a large part of the eastern Mediterranean with no military purpose and will not make information gathered available to its main military ally in the region.

British imperialism is gearing up for an escalation of the war in the Middle East and putting the necessary resources in place. Just two days before the drone surveillance announcement, Defence Secretary Grant Shapps revealed that the UK is sending one of its most lethal warships to the Gulf, HMS Diamond, a Type 45 destroyer with the ability to shoot down missiles.

Sky News reported, "The UK's HMS Diamond will join a long-standing mission, dubbed Operation Kipion, which operates out of Bahrain and works with allied navies to provide additional maritime security to

commercial shipping in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean... equipped with a Wildcat helicopter, the Royal Navy destroyer will be joining HMS Lancaster, a Type 23 frigate, as well as three smaller minehunters and a Royal Fleet Auxiliary support ship, the Ministry of Defence said".

Another warship, HMS Duncan, is also on operations in the eastern Mediterranean.

When the UK earlier deployed two support ships and surveillance aircraft to the region, the Sunak government said that British ships "will be on standby to deliver practical support to Israel and partners in the region, and offer deterrence and assurance."

Shapps said that the latest deployment was a response to last month's hijacking by Houthi rebels in Yemen of an Israeli-linked cargo ship in the Red Sea. "It is critical that the UK bolsters our presence in the region, to keep Britain and our interests safe from a more volatile and contested world," he said.

Britain's role in supplying Israel's war-machine is critical. According to the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), "UK industry provides 15% of the components in the F-35 stealth combat aircraft that are currently being used in the bombardment of Gaza. The contract for the components is estimated... to be worth £336m since 2016."

Israel has 50 F-35s on order from the US, with 22 already delivered by the end of 2022, reports CAAT. The organisation estimates that "each aircraft involves around \$12 million to UK industry. This would imply a value of \$72 million (£58m) for total UK deliveries of F-35s to Israel in 2022..."

Much of what the UK sends to Israel's military is not even documented, with CAAT noting, "Between 2018 and 2022, the UK exported £146m in arms sales via Single Issue Export Licences. However, a large

proportion of military equipment exported is via Open General Export Licences. These open licences, which include the F-35 components, lack transparency and allow for unlimited quantities and value of exports of the specified equipment without further monitoring.”

Britain has two military bases on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, including RAF Akrotiri. *Haaretz* reported last month that over 40 US transport aircraft, 20 British transport aircraft and seven heavy transport helicopters have flown to RAF Akrotiri. They were loaded with cargo from strategic depots belonging to the US and NATO in Europe. US feeder flights to the Cyprus base have been made from Germany, Turkey and Spain.

Britain’s military involvement also includes troops on the ground, with its Cyprus bases playing a key role. The WWSWS reported last month that the “Conservative government has issued notices to the media to suppress reports of the operations of the Special Air Service (SAS) in Gaza.” This followed information revealed in several newspapers, including the *Sun*, which reported October 27, “Britain’s military bases in Cyprus offer a strategic presence in the eastern Med.” It revealed, “And the SAS sabre squadron has been joined on the island by a 100-strong crisis command team.”

The Sunak government refuses to confirm whether it has troops on the ground already in Gaza. On Monday, MPs were allotted just one hour to ask the government questions of the “Humanitarian Situation” in the Strip; a debate which hardly any of the mainly pro-war MPs across all parties showed up for.

Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn—who remains a party member but sits as an Independent having been expelled from the parliamentary party three years ago by leader Sir Kier Starmer—said in his comments that “Israel is clearly undertaking an act of cleansing of the entire population of Gaza”, which “is illegal in international law.” He then asked, “What is the role, purpose and military objective of British military participation in the whole area? Can he [Leo Docherty, a parliamentary under-secretary of state at the Foreign Office] assure us that there are no British soldiers on the ground in Gaza?”

Docherty refused to even acknowledge the questions, replying, “It is clear that Israel’s objective is to defend itself against the terrorist group of Hamas.”

Britain’s military role in the region is maintained to

ensure its ruling elite profit from the spoils of genocide and war, as the trusted partners of US imperialism. Bloomberg and *Newsweek* reported in October that the Biden administration is considering sending in “peacekeepers for the Gaza Strip”, once Hamas is wiped out and Gaza depopulated, and that the “Multinational force could include American, UK, French troops.”

Despite a November 1 statement by White House spokesperson John Kirby that there are “no plans or intention to put US military troops on the ground in Gaza, now or in the future”, Bloomberg reported that the Biden administration “is still talking to partners about what a post-conflict Gaza should look like. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, “if that means some sort of international presence, then that’s something we’re talking about.”

Bloomberg reported that “one option would grant temporary oversight to Gaza to countries from the region, backed by troops from the US, UK, Germany and France.”

On Monday, John Bolton, the former Republican US national security adviser, proposed at the UK’s Foreign Affairs Select Committee that the Gaza Strip should be split into two territories, with Gaza north of the Wadi Gaza River administered by Israel and an area to the south run by Egypt.

This would be initiated after the ethnic cleansing of most Palestinians and facilitate the transfer of those that remain. No Palestinians would be allowed to settle in Israel, which Bolton said would not even provide work visas, but must all be resettled in other countries.



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