BRITAIN- ISRAEL RELATIONS

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

- As part of the 2013 UK Government trade mission to Israel there should be an emphasis on removing trade barriers that exist between the UK and Israel, as well as lowering the costs further. New areas of co-operation should be looked at, such as environmentally friendly trade, in which Israel is a world leader.
- Whilst there are a large number of UK companies based in Israel and vice versa, these numbers could be increased. For instance, Israeli firms could be encouraged to set up in the UK through a lower corporation tax, which would incentivise Israeli companies to set up in the UK.
- The relationship between Israel and Britain is strong, particularly on foreign affairs, and nothing should be done to endanger this. With this in mind the British Government should ignore calls from those who demonise and abuse Israel. When it comes to the peace process it is important that in any statements the UK Government make, they do not solely blame Israel for the failure of the peace process.
- We should continue to build on the strong trade ties between the two nations who share common values on democracy and free trade. This is crucial to a mutually beneficial relationship that will bring the two nations closer together. More collaborative work between Israel and Britain in areas like hi-tech would aid this.

THE SITUATION TODAY

- The NHS benefits from Britain’s relationship with Israel. The Israeli pharmaceuticals company Teva is the largest supplier of generic drugs to the NHS. Given the importance of the NHS in British life, Israel’s continuing contribution to the NHS should not be downplayed.
- Britain is now a committed friend of Israel and calls for the implementation of the two state solution based on the Oslo accords. It is important to highlight this friendship but also making clear that nothing should be done to jeopardise this friendship.
- Britain and Israel have established a crucial relationship based on shared values, strategic interests, commerce, science, trade and personal meetings between Israeli and British people. The relationship is based on a shared commitment to liberty and democracy. Co-operation in the fields of security and intelligence has increased with the rise of Islamic extremism and international terrorism. We must remember the shared values of the UK and Israel, as the basis for the warm relationship with Britain and Israel.
- Figures obtained by Graham Evans MP show that Israel is one of the UK’s key strategic business partners and has become its largest individual trading partner in the Near East and North Africa. Over the past 10 years the value of bilateral trade in both directions has increased by 60% from £2.3 billion to more than £3.7 billion. In 2011 the value of British exports to Israel reached £1.57 billion and Israel’s exports to the UK, primarily machinery, diamonds, technology and pharmaceuticals, totalled £2.18 billion. These figures show how valuable the trading relationship to both sides are and therefore how disastrous a boycott of Israel in the economic arena would be.
- More than 300 Israeli-related firms operate in the UK and more than 75 major UK companies have offices in Israel. When Britain sends its trade mission to Israel this year, work should be done to increase these already impressive numbers.
Alistair Burt, the Middle East Minister, highlighted that imports from Israel to the UK were more than £500,000 from January to March 2012. The UK exported £439 million of goods from January to March 2012, an increase of 13% on the same period in 2011. We hope to see a similar increase in the figures for 2012-2013 and thank Mr Burt for all his work in this area, which has made a real difference.

Over 1,000 Israelis study in the UK and 8,000 take UK degrees through the Open University whilst based in Israel. BIRAX (Britain-Israel Research and Academic Partnership) promotes stronger academic ties between the two nations. These would be damaged by a boycott of Israeli universities, which those from the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement are calling for.

Prime Minister David Cameron has repeatedly stated his opposition to the BDS movement saying in a speech he gave to the UJIA in 2012 “I say not only will this Government never allow you to shut down 60 years worth of vibrant exchange and partnership that does so much to make both our countries stronger, but I also say this: we know what you are doing – trying to delegitimise the State of Israel - and we will not have it”. Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Democrats and Ed Milliband, the leader of the Labour Party, have also spoken out against boycotts of Israel with Ed Milliband saying in 2013, “I think the boycotts of Israel are totally wrong”. We thank all the main party leaders for their continued opposition to boycotts of Israel and hope this position is maintained in the future.

British Ambassador to Israel, Matthew Gould, reflected Government policy when he came out strongly against a boycott of Israel stating, “We believe that boycotts divide people and reduce understanding, when what we need is to bring people together”.

The British Government have also spoken out against attempts to boycott goods coming from Israeli settlements in the West Bank. This was expressed by the UK agriculture minister James Paice, who said that “the Government does not believe that a government imposed ban or boycott of settlement produce would help, engage or influence Israel or lead to progress in the peace process”. It is important that this position does not change in the face of pressure from anti-Israel NGOs.

Britain and Israel have both spoken out against the threat posed by the Iranian regime to international security and have both called a nuclear Iran under its present leadership unacceptable. On key issues like this Britain’s support of Israel in the international community is invaluable and we hope to see this continuing.

During Operation Pillar of Defence in November 2012 William Hague, The British Foreign Secretary, made clear he placed the blame for this conflict on Hamas due to Hamas’s continued rocket fire into Israel. This was important, as it played a major role in many British people seeing how Israel had every right to defend itself.

In an event organised by Israel Connect in March to highlight the close ties between Israel, the Deputy Ambassador to Israel from the UK, Rob Dixon, spoke to an audience of over 40 Israeli young professionals. The event covered many areas including the strong relations in economics, trade, hi-tech and education between Israel and the UK that are to the benefit of both, as well as the peace process. We feel these events are an important way of bringing the people of Britain and Israel closer together.

SUGGESTED PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS FOR MPS TO ASK

1. In the 2013 UK Government trade mission to Israel will an emphasis be put on removing any trade barriers to commerce between the UK and Israel?
2. Will the UK Government trade mission to Israel look at ways that the numbers of UK companies based in Israel and the number of Israeli companies based in the UK can be increased and what steps will the UK Government take to implement this?
3. Can I congratulate the Foreign Secretary for his work in strengthening the friendship between Israel and Britain. Can he ensure me that nothing will be done to endanger this mutually beneficial relationship?
4. Can I thank the Trade Minister for his work in improving the trade relationship between Israel and Britain, which is bringing the two nations who share common values on democracy and free trade closer together. What plans does the UK Government have to maintain and strengthen the trade ties between the UK and Israel in the near future?
HISTORY OF BRITAIN ISRAEL RELATIONS

BEFORE THE BALFOUR DECLARATION AND ITS AFTERMATH

- Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, alongside the anglophile Chaim Weizmann (who was Israel’s first President) were motivated by British sympathy to Jewish Zionist aspirations. This was communicated by a letter sent by Lord Balfour to Nathaniel Rothschild in November 1917 that said “Her Majesty’s Government (UK Government) viewed with sympathy the formation of a Jewish National Home in Palestine”.
- In World War 1 Britain took over Palestine from the Ottoman Empire who they were fighting against.
- During World War 1 the seeds of war between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine were sewn by the British Empire. The Arabs believed in a series of diplomatic cables between the British diplomat Henry McMahon and Sheikh Hussein the Grand Sherif of Emir that they were promised independence in all of the Middle Eastern lands apart from small sections of Syria. At the same time the Jews believed they were promised the land in the Balfour Declaration.
- Britain was granted the Palestine mandate on 27th February 1919 and this was formalised by the League of Nations (predecessor to the United Nations) at the 1922 San Remo Conference. The mandate sought to implement the Balfour Declaration that would lead to the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

BETWEEN WORLD WAR 1 AND WORLD WAR 2

- The British mandatory authorities granted the Jewish and Arab communities the right to run their own internal affairs.
- In 1920 the Jewish community created the Yishuv, an elected governing body and an elected national council (Va’ad Leumi) to implement policy and progress. This was funded by local resources and the fundraising efforts of worldwide Jewry. The finance raised led to a network of education, health, religious and social services. This contributed significantly to the strength of political, religious, educational and health institutions in Israel today.
- In 1922 the Jewish Agency was created to represent the Jewish people in Palestine Vis a Vis the British Government and other foreign governments as well as international organisations.
- In 1921 Herbert Samuel who was the first British high commissioner of Palestine appointed the Arab nationalist Haj Amin-Al Husseini to the position of Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Husseini was an extremist who persecuted Palestinian moderates and fomented the Arab riots of the 1920s and 30s. This showed the folly of appeasing Palestinian extremists, who have attempted for decades to wreck the chances of peace.
- In the Peel Commission of 1937 the British Government recognised the opposing nationalist aims of the Arabs and Jews. The Commission called for the division of Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state linked by economic union. The Yishuv accepted the proposal and the Jewish Agency used this to put pressure through diplomacy on the British Government to reformulate various aspects of the proposal. The Arabs, led by Haj Amin Al Husseini, were vehemently against the Commission. The proposals led to large scale Arab Riots against the Jews and the British mandatory authorities.
- Due to the riots in May 1939 the British Government imposed drastic restrictions on Jewish immigration in the Macdonald White Paper at a time when the Jewish people were seeking sanctuary from Nazi persecution.
- On the back of this and with World War 2 on the horizon, the leader of the Yishuv, David Ben Gurion, said “we will fight the white paper as if there was no war and fight the war as if there was no white paper.”
WORLD WAR 2

- During World War 2 30,000 Jewish people from Palestine joined the British army and some formed a British army regiment called the Jewish Brigades. This brought the people of Britain and Israel closer together.
- The Foreign Office restrictions on Jewish immigration were tightened. The British Government ignored calls from the Jewish Agency, supported by the American Government to allow 100,000 Jews immediately into Palestine.

AFTER WORLD WAR 2

- From 1945-1948 some 85,000 Jews were bought in clandestinely into Palestine. Those who were caught were held either in Atlit Detention centre or in Displaced Person camps in Cyprus by the British after World War 2.
- Economically bankrupt, as well as with moral at rock bottom, Britain looked for a way out of Palestine. They also failed to deal with the competing Jewish and Arab aims that were leading to increased violence. Britain therefore requested that the Palestine question be placed on the agenda of the UN assembly.
- The partition plan was approved by the UN General Assembly through resolution 181 that led to the creation of the Jewish state. Britain, fearing the Arab world’s reaction, abstained in the vote.
- In May 1948 the British mandate came to an end.

AFTER THE CREATION OF ISRAEL

- In the 1950s Israel developed strong ties with the UK that remain in place to this day.
- In 1956 Israel joined forces with the British and French Government in the Sinai campaign to stand up to General Nasser’s (Egypt’s leaders) aggression.
- Britain played a key diplomatic role in helping Israel talk to their Arab neighbours in secret. One such example was the meeting between the Israeli diplomat Abba Eban and King Hussein of Jordan in London in 1969. In addition in August 1976 Moshe Dayan met with King Hussein in London.
- Britain’s relations with Israel became extremely warm in the 1960s due to British Prime Minister Harold Wilson who was a Zionist.
- British relations with Israel became strained under the Heath Government as during the Yom Kippur War the British Government placed an arms embargo on Israel that was not removed until well into the 1980s. However these ties were strengthened once again under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who was the first British Prime Minister to make a state visit to Israel.
- Ties became even warmer under Tony Blair, who was a committed friend of Israel and during the second Lebanon war was one of the few world leaders