

Israel-Hamas war

UK and EU ratchet up pressure on Israel over Gaza offensive

International criticism of the military campaign in the Palestinian enclave increases



An Israeli tank near the Gaza border on Monday. Israel has expanded its offensive in recent days, expanding its ground operations and carrying out air strikes © Amir Levy/Getty Images

James Shotter in Jerusalem, **David Sheppard** in London and **Andy Bounds** in Brussels

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The UK and EU have ratcheted up pressure on Israel over its renewed military offensive in Gaza, as an Israeli opposition leader warned that the country risked becoming a “pariah state” over its campaign.

British foreign minister David Lammy said on Tuesday that the UK would freeze talks on a new trade deal with Israel in response to the “abominable” situation caused by its offensive in Gaza.

Hours later, the EU’s top diplomat, Kaja Kallas, said the bloc would review its trade agreement with Israel in light of the “catastrophic” situation in the Palestinian enclave, after 17 of its 27 member states backed the move.

The twin actions came after Yair Golan, leader of Israel’s Democrats party, said on Tuesday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right government was “endangering” the country’s existence with its conduct in the [war against Hamas](#),

which has provoked concerns even within US President Donald Trump's administration.

"Israel is on the way to becoming a pariah state, like South Africa was, if we don't return to acting like a sane country," Golan told Israeli public radio.

"A sane country does not fight against civilians, does not kill babies as a hobby and does not give itself the aim of expelling populations."

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Palestinians are fleeing southern Gaza as Israel expands its offensive © Reuters

Golan's remarks drew a furious response from Netanyahu, who accused the former general of "wild incitement" and "echoing the most despicable antisemitic blood libels against [Israel Defense Forces] soldiers and the State of Israel".

Israel has hugely [stepped up its offensive](#) in Gaza in recent days, expanding its ground operations in the enclave and carrying out air strikes that have killed hundreds of Palestinians.

Until Monday, it had also not allowed any food, aid, medicines or fuel to enter Gaza for more than two months, which a UN panel last week said had left nearly 500,000 Palestinians facing starvation.

Tom Fletcher, a senior UN official, said on Tuesday that 14,000 babies in Gaza were

at risk of dying in the next 48 hours if aid did not reach them. Earlier this month, he warned of a looming “genocide” in Gaza.

Israel rejected the genocide accusation and has insisted that its restrictions on aid entering Gaza were designed to prevent it being diverted to Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that controls the territory.



Opposition leader Yair Golan said the far-right government was ‘endangering’ Israel’s existence with its conduct of the war against Hamas © Eyal Warshavsky/SOPA Images/LightRocket/Getty Images

But Israel’s approach — including a new plan to allow a little-known foundation to deliver aid to Palestinians at a handful of distribution points expected to be concentrated in southern Gaza — has drawn increasing international criticism, including from some of its staunchest allies.

Netanyahu has conceded that the decision to allow minimal amounts of aid into Gaza was a response to pressure from Israel’s “friends” across the world and in the US Congress, who had warned the Israeli prime minister that “we will not accept pictures of mass starvation”.

The UK, France and Canada said on Monday they would take “concrete actions” against Israel if it did not stop the offensive and lift restrictions on aid entering Gaza.

The international criticism intensified on Tuesday with the UK summoning the Israeli ambassador over the escalation in Gaza and Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer demanding Israel “massively scale up” aid to the enclave.

“Innocent children being bombed again is utterly intolerable,” Starmer told the UK parliament. “The recent announcement that Israel will allow a ‘basic’ quantity of food into Gaza — a basic quantity — is totally and utterly inadequate.”

Lammy accused Netanyahu’s government of “planning to drive Gazans from their homes into a corner of the strip in the south, and permit them a fraction of the aid that they need”.

Lammy also lambasted Bezalel Smotrich, Israel’s ultranationalist finance minister, who said on Monday that Israel was “cleansing” Gaza and “destroying everything that’s left” of the enclave.

“We must call this what it is: it is extremist, it is dangerous, it is repellent, it is monstrous and I condemn it in the strongest possible terms.”

An EU diplomat said that regardless of the outcome of the bloc’s review of its trade agreement with Israel “the fact that a large majority of member states asked for it sends a strong signal to the Israeli government”.

There was further criticism from Qatar and France.

Qatar’s Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani said Israel’s blockade on Gaza “shouldn’t be acceptable to the international community”.

French foreign minister Jean-Noël Barrot said Paris was “determined” to recognise a Palestinian state, without setting a concrete timeframe for such a step.

Israel’s offensive in Gaza has killed more than 53,500 people, according to Palestinian officials. During Hamas’s October 7 2023 attack on Israel, militants killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli officials, and took 250 hostage.

There is also mounting international concern about the situation in the occupied West Bank, where Israel has ratcheted up its military operations and settler violence against Palestinians has surged.

On Tuesday, the UK imposed sanctions on three Israeli settlers, two illegal settler outposts and two organisations supporting violence against Palestinian communities in the territory.

The EU also discussed imposing further sanctions on violent settlers, but the proposal was vetoed by Hungary, two diplomats said.

Additional reporting by Chloe Cornish

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