

The UK Response to Pronouncements & Policies of the Trump Administration

Introduction

There are several escalating threats to Palestinian rights and the basic principles of the rule of law arising from recent policies and pronouncements made by members of the Trump administration and its Congressional allies. These include proposing the ethnic cleansing of the Gaza Strip and the imposition of sanctions against the International Criminal Court; having already withdrawn funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency and the lifting of sanctions against illegal Israeli settlements. The UK must respond with urgent defence of international law, and must act in line with its treaty obligations.

Trump's ethnic cleansing plan for Gaza; annexation plan for the West Bank

Commencing last week, Trump has proposed the 'cleaning out' of the Gaza Strip and the relocation of its population, two million Palestinians, to other states – including Egypt, Jordan, and Indonesia.¹ Hosting Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week, Trump's rhetoric escalated to claiming American control of the Strip: "*The US will take over the Gaza strip, we'll own it*", proposing to make the Gaza Strip the "*Riviera of the Middle East*" and finding an "*area to resettle people, permanently*."²

This rhetoric has a significant destabilising effect on the whole region and implementation of these policies would, if pursued, represent a grave breach of international law. The UK is a signatory to the Rome Statute (1998), the founding document of the International Criminal Court, which codifies the forcible transfer of populations as a crime against humanity (Article 7(1)(d)) and as a war crime (Article 8(2)(a)(viii)).³ While the US is not a State Party to the Rome Statute, such acts are also prohibited in accordance with Article 49 of the Geneva Convention IV (1949) and have been considered a grave breach of the Convention as stipulated in Article 147.⁴

Similarly, Republican lawmakers have introduced Bills to both the House and the Senate which would rename the West Bank as 'Judea and Samaria',⁵ in line with Israeli pronouncements of an ancient sovereignty over the occupied Palestinian territory. Trump's election has sparked hope among Israeli settlers and right-wing politicians for American recognition of formal annexation of the West Bank, not least given his 2019 recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the illegally occupied Syrian Golan.⁶ Such a move imperils the three million Palestinians in the West Bank – already subject to occupation and settler violence – and must be rejected in the strongest terms. As with proposed depopulation of Gaza, these pronouncements directly threaten the legally-protected principle of Palestinian self-determination and the future of a Palestinian state, both of which the UK claims to support.⁷

Sanctions Against the International Criminal Court (ICC)

On 9th January 2025, the US House of Representatives passed the Illegitimate Court Counteraction Act (H.R.23), which would impose sanctions against the ICC, its officials, and those supporting its investigations.⁸ As of 28th January 2025, the Bill failed to advance to a final vote in the Senate, falling short by 6 votes of the 60 needed. Senate Democrats' opposition is attributed to the Bill's drafting

¹ Betsy Klein and Lex Harvey. (26th January 2025), [Trump suggests his plan for Gaza Strip is to 'clean out the whole thing.'](#) CNN

² Andy Hayes (5th February 2025), [Trump says US will take over Gaza and all Palestinians should relocate](#), Sky News

³ International Criminal Court, [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court \(1998\)](#)

⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross, [Convention \(IV\) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War](#)

⁵ Ephrat Livni (4th February 2025), [West Bank? No, Judea and Samaria, Some Republicans Say](#)

⁶ BBC News (25th March 2019), [Golan Heights: Trump signs order recognising occupied area as Israeli](#)

⁷ Barbara Woodward (16th September 2024), [Humanitarian workers in Gaza must be allowed to carry out their work safely](#)

⁸ US Congress (2025), Summary: H.R.23 - 119th [Congress](#) (2025-2026).

having failed to provide protections for US companies which have rendered services to the ICC.⁹

Sanctions against the ICC remain highly likely to be enacted, either with concessions to Senate Democrats or via executive order. In June 2020, within his first Presidential term, Trump deployed an executive order to impose sanctions against the ICC's Chief Prosecutor and his officials.¹⁰ At the time, the United Kingdom stood strongly behind the ICC against threats from the US – it must do so again now, particularly given the unprecedented threat to the ICC's critical work, not least in relation to its ongoing investigation on the situation in Palestine.

Revocation of Executive Order 14115 (Lifting Sanctions on Illegal Settlements).

On his first day in office, the Trump administration lifted sanctions on extremist settler groups responsible for violent and illegal acts in occupied Palestinian territory, by revoking Biden's Executive Order 14115: "Imposing Certain Sanctions on Persons Undermining Peace, Security and Stability in the West Bank."¹¹ The move, reintroducing the principle of impunity for Israel's illegal settlement project, is inevitably due to lead to greater violence against Palestinians including their deaths, and the displacement of them from their lands. In the month of January 2025 alone, there were already a reported 2,100 attacks by Israeli settlers and military against Palestinians.¹²

This policy is at odds with UK interests, given its stated commitments to a sanctions policy against settlers which aims to bring "*accountability to those who have supported and perpetrated such heinous abuses of human rights*", having added that "*as long as violent extremists remain unaccountable, the UK and the international community will continue to act.*"¹³ In line with this commitment, the UK expand its sanctions policy to target the institutional drivers of Israeli settlement expansion, while outlining how it will ensure adherence to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice which mandated, among other things, the dismantlement of Israeli settlements.¹⁴

Foreign Aid Funding

Despite the ceasefire agreement's first phase commencing over two weeks ago, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains dire. Critical needs for food, water, tents and shelter materials persist particularly in the Gaza and North Gaza governates,¹⁵ while Gaza's healthcare and water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructures remain debilitated. The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is and remains the only viable humanitarian operation to meet catastrophic levels of need. In this context, to avert disaster and save lives, the UK must adopt the maximum diplomatic response against the US' continued – and now, apparently, permanent – withdrawal of funding from UNRWA,¹⁶ as well as against Israel's legislative banning of UNRWA's operations. Of the funding allocated by the UK to humanitarian relief in Gaza,¹⁷ it remains unclear what proportion is allocated for UNRWA, nor what steps the UK is taking to ensure UNRWA's continued function under American and Israeli restrictions.

⁹ Patricia Zengerle (28th January 2025), [US Senate Democrats block bill to sanction international court over Israel](#), Reuters

¹⁰ CNN (11th June 2020), [Trump Signs Executive Order Targeting International Criminal Court](#)

¹¹ Al Jazeera (21st January 2025), [Trump Lifts US Sanctions on Israeli Settlers in the Occupied West Bank](#)

¹² Middle East Monitor (3rd February 2025) [2,100 Israeli assaults in occupied West Bank in January, report says](#)

¹³ UK Government (15th October 2024) [New UK Sanctions Target Illegal Outposts and Organisations Supporting Extremist Israeli Settlers in the West Bank](#)

¹⁴ United Nations (30th July 2024) [Press Release: Experts hail ICJ declaration on illegality of Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory as "historic" for Palestinians and international law](#)

¹⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (5th February 2025) [Humanitarian Situation Update #261](#)

¹⁶ Tom Bateman. (25th January 2025) [US orders immediate pause to foreign aid, leaked memo says](#). BBC News.

¹⁷ UK Government (28th January 2025) [New humanitarian support for Gaza as ceasefire allows operations to scale up](#)