

Halt visa-free travel for Israelis until settlement expansion ends

Such action is increasingly being used as a tool for diplomatic leverage – and the UK itself has already set a precedent

COMMENT
BY MICHAEL
HARRIS

ONLY two months after the abhorrent antisemitic massacre at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia, it may seem inappropriate to suggest that the UK suspend visa-free travel for Israelis in order to motivate their government to end further territorial expansion.

But allowing antisemitic attacks to silence criticism of Israel's violations of international law only reinforces the politically-motivated conflation between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism.

The flip side of this conflation means that everything Israel does represents the actions of the Jewish people. That is an unhealthy narrative whose cycle needs to be broken, and UK visa policy can help.

After the despicable terror attacks targeting Jewish communities occurred, many blamed anti-Israel protests for the radicalisation of attackers.

While governments should never tolerate antisemitism, imposing constraints on lawful protests by supporters of Palestine only reinforces the narrative that Western governments are unwilling to

influence Israeli policies. To break the cycle, what is needed is not less public protest, but tangible government action to restrain Israel.

Protests in the UK are not meant to change Israeli government behaviour, they aim to change the UK Government's response to Israel's actions through policies that aim to bring a just end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Toothless statements of condemnation of illegal Israeli actions do little to improve prospects for future peace. Be it tension in the streets, at college campuses, or at Eurovision, sizeable segments of the public are frustrated by unwillingness to restrain Israeli breaches of international norms.

It is always difficult for governments to reprimand allies, especially when doing so risks provoking charges of antisemitism.

Unwilling to contemplate heavy-hitting sanctions, Israel's frustrated allies resort to public statements that only reinforce the perception of government impotence.

The UK and others felt recognising the Palestinian state would send a strong message to both Israel and

respective electorates. It did no such thing. Even after the Gaza ceasefire agreement, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to "forcibly resist a Palestinian state."

What options are there then for allies to influence Israel? Visa policy, historically a bureaucratic measure to limit the risk asylum seekers will enter a country, is increasingly being used as a tool for diplomatic leverage.

UNDER the UK Government's new immigration policy, countries that refuse to accept returns of individuals unlawfully present in the UK could see a reduction in the number of visas they are granted.

The precedent is set – visas are now leverage. The UK should consider visa policy to motivate Israel to stop its territorial expansion. It is a simple fact that Israel's continual settlement expansion rewards it for delaying peace. Each confiscated Palestinian home and uprooted olive grove in the West Bank is a direct benefit for Israel. Israeli territorial expansion,

and the unwillingness of most governments to tangibly challenge it, then throws fuel on the fire for those seeking to translate anti-Israeli sentiment into anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish sentiment.

The UK, in conditionally suspending visa-free travel for Israelis, would help motivate Israelis and their government to ask one simple question – should Israel continue its territorial expansion?

If the answer is yes, then Israel is not a credible partner for peace. If instead the Israeli government, or better yet the population via referendum, decides to end territorial expansion, it will remove the practical benefit Israel gets by delaying peace.

Ending visa-free travel for Israelis until Israel disavows further territorial expansion might seem a modest proposal. The inevitable uproar will indicate it is very relevant leverage.

As Indians, Turks, Chinese, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and citizens of the majority of the world's countries know, visa requirements to travel to the UK are normal. While seemingly minor, something that is tangibly noticeable by so many, with



The photograph Liz Truss posted on Twitter

Truss claims that Trump is 'right about everything'

BY STEPH BRAWN

FORMER prime minister Liz Truss has been slated for posting a "disturbing" photo with Donald Trump accompanied by the caption "right about everything" on social media.

Truss shared an image to Twitter/X where she and the US president are pictured shaking hands in colour coordinated outfits.

She claimed Trump is "right about everything" just days after he was widely panned for post-

ing a racist video depicting the Obamas as apes.

The UK's shortest-serving prime minister has received pelters in response with people calling it "disturbing" and "disgusting".

John Petrie posted on X: "Even by normal Truss levels of insanity, this is deeply disturbing."

"Truss has daughters and she thinks everything is right despite all she knows about the Epstein files. Very creepy."

Another user said: "I cannot fathom how anyone can have read

those files and still be able to post utter disgusting things like this."

"She was a catastrophic PM and he is potentially the worst president of all time."

The US president has consistently denied any wrongdoing in relation to Jeffrey Epstein and has said he did not know about his crimes, but he is mentioned many times in the newly-released files.

Last week it emerged a former Florida police chief said he received a call from Trump in 2006 in which the now-president

told him "everyone" knows about Epstein's behaviour, which is likely to raise further questions.

Asked by reporters in 2019 when Epstein was arrested by federal agents for sex trafficking if he had "any suspicions" about the disgraced financier, Trump said: "No, I had no idea. I had no idea. I haven't spoken to him in many, many years."

Truss has repeatedly made her admiration for Trump well-known.



Israeli citizens currently enjoy visa-free access to the United Kingdom

a clear conditionality associated just with territorial expansion, has the capacity to motivate Israeli national introspection.

Imposing visas will not change the reality that Israel does not currently have a proper Palestinian partner for peace. Visas can, however, focus Israeli attention on how its continual settlement expansion has been an important constraint to peace.

Ending future territorial expansion will allow Israel to legitimately claim the moral high ground, ending the cover antisemites have to attack Zionism.

Any country that wants to both reduce momentum for Middle Eastern conflict and help stem the rise in antisemitism, should use the leverage they have to motivate an end to Israeli settlement expansion.

Over Christmas, Israel announced 19 new settlements and the UK and its allies expressed outrage. Rather than condemnations without action, the UK should announce a suspension of visa-free travel until Israel commits to no further territorial expansion.

This will help empower the pro-peace camp in Israel, and importantly it will finally send a message of action over words to the UK electorate.

Michael Harris is founder of Cribstone Strategic Macro and director of the Syracuse University Whitman School of Management London Programme

Thousands call for British Museum to reinstate 'Palestine' in displays

BY STEPH BRAWN

THOUSANDS of people have called for the British Museum in London to reinstate the word "Palestine" into displays after it was removed.

Information boards in the museum's ancient Middle East galleries, covering the period from 1500BC to 1700BC, had referred to the eastern Mediterranean coast as Palestine, with some individuals described as being "of Palestinian descent".

UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI), a voluntary group of solicitors, reportedly complained, saying the term was being used "retrospectively" to describe civilisations that predated the modern use of the name.

Now more than 4000 people have signed a Change.org petition started by Taghrid Al-Mawed calling for the museum to reverse its decision. The move has received backlash with pro-Palestine writer Hamza Yusuf calling it "outrageous".

The petition – entitled Erasing a Word Erases a People: Reinstate Palestine in the British Museum – claims the change is "not supported by historical evidence and contributes to a wider pattern of erasing Palestinian presence from public memory".



It goes on: "If the British Museum is genuinely concerned about modern etymology, then consistency would require similar scrutiny of terms such as 'Britain', which is itself a relatively modern political construct.

"Yet 'Britain' remains unchallenged in the museum's own galleries. This selective removal suggests inconsistency in curatorial standards and raises concerns about political pressure influencing historical presentation."

The petition calls on the museum to restore the term "Palestine" to all relevant displays, provide transparency regarding the decision-making process, ensure that curatorial choices reflect historical accuracy and not political pressure, and uphold its responsibility as a publicly funded institution "to present history with integrity".

In its letter to museum director

Nicholas Cullinan, UKLFI argued that using the term Palestine in the exhibits "has the compounding effect of erasing the kingdoms of Israel and of Judea" and "re-framing the origins of the Israelites and Jewish people as erroneously stemming from Palestine".

The group specifically objected to labels in displays covering 1700–1500 BC that referred to the eastern Mediterranean coast as "Palestine" and described the Hyksos people as being of "Palestinian descent".

Those labels have now been changed to read "Canaan" and "Canaanite descent".

The museum has denied that the move came in response to the UKLFI complaint.

A British Museum spokesperson said: "For the Middle East galleries for maps showing ancient cultural regions, the term 'Canaan' is relevant for the southern Levant in the later second millennium BC.

"We use the UN terminology on maps that show modern boundaries, for example Gaza, West Bank, Israel, Jordan and refer to 'Palestinian' as a cultural or ethnographic identifier where appropriate."

However, academics who spoke to Middle East Eye said "ancient Palestine" is a historically accurate term.

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