

# Poll: UK Public Overwhelmingly Backs Gaza Ceasefire

LONDON (Dispatches) – The British public overwhelmingly support an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, a new poll has found.

Commissioned by Medical Aid for Palestinians and the Council for Arab-British Understanding, the poll was conducted by YouGov on Dec. 20-21 last year.

It found that 71 percent of the UK public believe there definitely (48 percent) and probably (23 percent) should be an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

The results come as civilian casualties in the Palestinian enclave reach more than 23,000 dead and 58,000 wounded, Gaza's Health Ministry reported.

Just 12 percent of the British public believe that there should definitely not (6 percent) and probably not (6 percent) be a ceasefire.

A YouGov poll carried out in October last year showed similar



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levels of support among the British public for a ceasefire.

MAP CEO Melanie Ward said: "Three months of bombardment and siege have resulted in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

"Children are starving, the

health system is collapsing and nearly 2 million people displaced from their homes.

"The message from the public couldn't be clearer: This must end now, and our politicians must play their part in making that happen."

The poll also asked respondents

about their views on the UK government's actions toward the conflict.

Just 17 percent approved of Britain's handling of the war, compared to 29 percent disapproval.

Meanwhile, supervisors in San Francisco approved a resolution calling for an extended ceasefire in Gaza.

Ceasefire advocates in the audience erupted into cheers and chants of "Free Palestine" after the 8-3 vote Tuesday on a last-minute compromise proposed by Aaron Peskin, president of the Board of Supervisors. It is more succinct than the original resolution.

Peskin, who is Jewish, acknowledged that no resolution would receive the board's unanimous support and lamented that they could not use the opportunity to bridge San Franciscans on both sides of the issue.

## Saudi Arabia Says Interested in Israel Normalization Deal Despite Gaza War

RIYADH (Dispatches) – Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the UK has stated that the country is still interested in normalizing relations with the Zionist regime after the war in Gaza.

A deal between the Zionist regime and Saudi Arabia was close before 7 October, Prince Khalid bin Bandar told the BBC.

Despite the "deplorable" casualty figures in Gaza, the kingdom was still interested in establishing ties with Israel, said Bandar, however this would not "come at

the cost of the Palestinian people", he added.

Speaking about the occupying regime, Bandar said: "The problem that we have today with the current regime in Israel is there is an extreme, absolutist perspective which does not work to achieve compromise and therefore you are never going to end the conflict."

Saudi crown prince Mohammad bin Salman told Fox News in an interview aired late September that they "get closer

every day to normalization with Tel Aviv. Zionist premiere Benjamin Netanyahu said during his UN speech last month that the regime was at the cusp of a historic normalization deal with Saudi Arabia.

However, the Zionist regime's genocide in the Gaza Strip has reportedly blocked further talks.

Washington's efforts for adding Saudi Arabia to the list of Arab countries that have signed the so-called Abraham Accords come at a critical time when U.S.

President Joe Biden is seeking re-election and the U.S. government has been left embarrassed by the kingdom's bolstering of ties with Iran and Syria, and its further gravitation toward China.

The UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco signed U.S.-brokered normalization agreements with the Zionist regime in 2020, drawing condemnations from Palestinians who slammed the deals as "a stab in the back of the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people".

### Immediate...

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prospect of an immediate ceasefire and the opening of corridors to send humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza and other occupied Palestinian territories," it said.

"We express our deep concern along with the international community because the flames of the Zionist regime's demonic actions will extend beyond the borders of occupied Palestine. Given the current dire situation in Palestine, the entire region faces a very serious challenge that could have dangerous consequences for global peace and security," it added.

The statement said the Palestinian issue is the primary concern for the Islamic world, noting that the occupied Al-Quds and Al-Aqsa Mosque at its heart are a "red line for all Muslims".

"We confirm that the war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocidal acts committed by the politicians and military forces of the Zionist regime in the Gaza Strip, including military attacks, ground operations, air raids, destruction of homes, places of worship, public service centers, schools, hospitals, as well as the massacre of innocent people and their detentions, blatantly violate international human rights laws and constitute a deliberate violation of relevant United Nations resolutions," the statement said.

"These acts must be referred to the relevant international courts for prosecution," it added.

### Zionist...

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The document also details Gazans' reduced access to food, water, and medical treatment as a result of the war and Israeli policies regarding the entry of such items, and fuel, into the Gaza Strip.

And it lays out what it sees as highly problematic comments by prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, war minister Yoav Gallant, finance minister Bezalel Smotrich, security minister Itamar Ben Gvir, all of whom are members of the critical war cabinet which makes policy decisions on the prosecution of the war. The application states that these comments either dehumanized Palestinians, threatened indiscriminate attacks on Gaza or could be understood as threatening Gazan civilians.

"The acts and omissions by Israel complained of by South Africa are genocidal in character because they are intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinian national, racial and ethnic group," the application charges.

More countries joined South Africa ahead of the hearing. The Maldives, Namibia, and Pakistan expressed their support for the lawsuit during a United Nations General Assembly session on Tuesday.

Other countries that have already expressed support for the case include Bolivia, Jordan, Malaysia, and Turkey.

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regime has forcibly displaced nearly 1.9 million people in Gaza. Many were shot and killed while raising white flags and fleeing on roads designated by Israel as safe.

"I don't think there are any innocents there now, not now and not when I said those things," Vaturi said.

In the occupied West Bank, Zionist forces raided Nablus and besieged the Old City, injuring at least 12 Palestinians, Al Jazeera reported.

### Russia...

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war in the Gaza Strip, and the establishment of a Palestinian state," Lavrov emphasized.

Stressing the need to expand relations between Moscow and Tehran, Lavrov highlighted the significance of finalizing a comprehensive and strategic cooperation agreement between the two countries and focusing on closer bilateral cooperation in the transportation sector.

The two ministers also discussed the final steps regarding the long-term cooperation agreement between Tehran and Moscow and the implementation of the Rasht-Astara railroad project, alongside plans to facilitate the Iranian truckers' travels on the Belarus-Russia route.

### Envoy...

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only practical way to proceed is to prevent and stop the criminal and genocidal aggression against innocent civilians in Gaza, establish a sustainable and durable ceasefire, ensure access to humanitarian assistance on a large scale, and halt the forced displacement of the People in the Gaza Strip," he said.

"Without a sustainable ceasefire, the tragedy worsens, leading to the loss of innocent lives, including children, and women."

Iravani also stressed that the Israeli occupation should be punished for its international wrongdoings, which he said have put the whole West Asia region on fire.

"The United States faces a critical choice: it can either persist in its current trajectory, or it can choose to refrain from providing unconditional support," the top Iranian diplomat asserted.

"Without such support, Israel would encounter difficulties in sustaining its actions of mass violence and genocide against the Palestinian population."

Since the start of Israel's brutal aggression on Gaza on October 7, the United States has vetoed several resolutions at the United Nations that aimed to establish a ceasefire and stop the Israeli massacre of Palestinians in the besieged territory.

## Women Detained in Fresh Crackdown in Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) – A Taliban official has said several girls and women were detained recently in Kabul for allegedly not covering themselves properly, after reports circulated of a crackdown in the Afghan capital.

In a video posted on social media Wednesday, security official Ehsanullah Saqib told a gathering of religious scholars in Kabul's western Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood that in the past week "we have detained a number of women and girls who were without hijab, with the help of women police".

Since returning to power in August 2021, Taliban authorities have imposed a strict rule, with women bearing the brunt of laws the United Nations has labeled "gender apartheid".

Women have been squeezed from public life, barred from travelling without a male relative and ordered to cover everything but their hands and eyes when outside the home, though many women still go out in Kabul without covering their mouths.

Ehsanullah, addressing the gathering on Tuesday according to the video posted on X by Khaama Press and Amu TV, said the women and girls were detained because they were "totally without hijab", wearing trousers or leggings and dresses, instead of a garment that loosely covers the whole body.

"They were arrested to inform their families that their sister, daughter or wife roams without hijab and they should prevent this," he said.

Abdul Ghafar Sabawoon, spokesman for the Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue, told AFP the women had "only been advised by female police to have greater respect and dignity (in observing hijab)".

"No woman has been disrespected or humiliated, nor do we have anyone in the custody in connection to this."

In a recent post on X, the ministry denied some images circulating were of police rounding up women over not wearing hijab, saying they were pictures of authorities removing beggars from the streets.

A human rights activist in Afghanistan who asked not to be identified said the detentions were meant to "put pressure on families to force women and girls to wear

hijab and instill fear in women and girls through their families".

"This is the first time the Taliban has arrested women and girls from the streets openly" over hijab, she told AFP.

"But the arrest of a group of women under the pretext of 'bad hijab' was neither surprising, nor unexpected, because we know that the Taliban try to suppress women in every possible way and use fear and terror to oppress them."

UN special rapporteur Richard Bennett responded to initial reports of the detentions in a post on X on Friday, saying the recent "arrests of women in Kabul... regrettably signifies further restrictions on women's freedom of expression and undermines their rights".

## India's Modi Slammed as 'Puppet of Israel'

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) – Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promotion of tourism on an Indian island chain has sparked a row with the Maldives after senior officials from that country accused Modi of being a "puppet of Israel".

The tussle started when Modi posted a seemingly innocuous image of himself reclining on a lounge chair at a white sand beach in Lakshadweep, an archipelago of 36 Indian islands. Other pictures showed the 73-year-old leader snorkeling and wearing an orange life vest.

"Those early morning walks along the pristine beaches were also moments of pure bliss," Modi wrote on the social media platform, X.

Maryam Shiuna, a deputy minister in the Maldives' government, labeled Modi "a clown" and "puppet of Israel" on X. Another official slammed Modi as a "terrorist".

The island archipelago nation south of the subcontinent has carved out a niche for itself catering to well-heeled, jet-setting tourists. It was allegedly a favorite spot for Mohammed Bin Salman to host raucous beach parties before he became the crown prince of Saudi Arabia.

On Monday, one of India's largest travel sites suspended flight bookings to the Maldives. Indian celebrities have started social media campaigns to promote ditching the Maldives in favor of Indian beach spots like

Lakshadweep.

After the uproar, the Maldivian government said it had suspended three deputy ministers who made the critical remarks. Their social media posts were deleted and disavowed by the government.

But Modi is close to Israel, and on Monday an account on X linked to the Israeli embassy in India appeared to turn the criticism against Modi into a sign of endorsement.

"We were in #Lakshadweep last year upon the federal government's request to initiate the desalination program," the social media post said.

"Israel is ready to commence working on this project tomorrow."