

This is the final political update before the summer recess. If anyone would like information or briefings to be produced on the Middle East Peace Process, regional developments, domestic Israeli and Palestinian affairs and issues affecting UK policy on Israel please do not hesitate to get in touch. Our contact details can be found at the end of the document. Wishing you all well over the break.

Political

update: Terror attack in Jerusalem following Gordon Brown's visit – 23 July

Key points:

- Brown vowed to sustain pressure on Iran's nuclear programme
- UK-Israel academic cooperation project launched
- The second Jerusalem bulldozer attack in a month wounds seventeen

Latest developments

- On his visit to Israel to mark its 60th anniversary, Prime Minister Gordon Brown became the first British Prime Minister to address the Israeli Knesset (21 July). The Prime minister congratulated Israel on its achievements, stating that “no other country has accomplished as much in such a short time.”
- Rejecting any calls for an academic boycott Brown used his visit to launch BIRAX, the Britain-Israel research and academic exchange partnership to improve bilateral academic cooperation between Britain and Israel.
- Brown used the opportunity to condemn Iranian threats against Israel as “abhorrent” and vowed that pressure against Iran's nuclear programme would not stop. He said the UK stood ready to lead in pushing for firmer sanctions against Iran.
- Brown told the Knesset that peace was within their grasp, and that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad represent Israel's best partners for peace in a generation. Brown called on the Palestinians to prevent terrorism against Israel, stating that:

“to those who question Israel's very right to exist, and threaten the lives of its citizens through terror we say: the people of Israel have a right to live here, to live freely and to live in security.” (21/07/08)

- Immediately following Brown's visit to Israel twenty four people were injured, one seriously, when a terrorist drove a bulldozer through central Jerusalem striking several vehicles before being shot and killed by a civilian and a Border Policeman (22 July).
- Responding to recent terrorist attacks carried out by Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, Israeli security sources have expressed their wish to authorise punitive measures such as the razing of terrorists' homes.

Background

Gordon Brown's visit

- During his trip to Israel, which began on Saturday (July 19), the PM met with the Israeli President Shimon Peres, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Defence Minister Ehud Barak as well as opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu. He visited Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial museum and laid a wreath.
- Whilst addressing the Knesset Brown launched BIRAX which has the backing of the two governments. It will be co-ordinated through the British Council and already has funding of more than £700,000 pledged over five years from government and private donors. It will award scientific research grants to junior academics.
- A delegation of UK businessmen accompanied Brown to Bethlehem where he met with President Abbas and Salam Fayyad on Sunday (20 July). At a joint news conference with Abbas Brown promised £30 million in new aid to the Palestinians
- Brown said that investment was vital for stability in the region and that Britain would lead the way in supporting an economic road map for peace.

Background

Jerusalem terror attack

- The terror attack on Tuesday was the third attack in Jerusalem this year, and the second to use a stolen construction vehicle. A Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem plowed a bulldozer into a bus and a string of cars on Jaffa Street on 3 July killing three women and injuring dozens more.
- A gunman from east Jerusalem killed eight students in a religious school on 7 March.
- During the first half of the year, the Shin Bet security service arrested 71 Palestinians from East Jerusalem suspected of being involved in attacks, compared to 37 such arrests during the entire year of 2007.
- Approximately 253,000 Palestinians hold Jerusalem ID cards which, unlike Palestinians in the West Bank, entitles them to the same benefits as Israeli citizens allowing them full freedom to work and travel throughout Israel.
- The unique situation of Arab East Jerusalem has in recent months shown to pose a serious security threat to Israel as there are limited security measures that Israel can put in place within the city.