



Foreign minister swerves questions about Britons fighting for Israel

Description

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Hamish Falconer ran through traffic in Whitehall when asked if the government allows British citizens to fight in Gaza

Foreign minister Hamish Falconer refused to answer questions on Wednesday about the UK government's failure to stop British nationals fighting for the Israeli army in Gaza.

It comes after more than 25,000 people signed a [letter](#) to the Foreign Office demanding they investigate UK citizens who fought in Gaza and may have committed war crimes.

Thousands of British nationals have served in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) since the Gaza conflict began in 2023, according to a Freedom of Information response from the IDF first published by [Declassified](#)

Britain's Foreign Office does no monitoring of its own and was initially only aware of just [80](#) UK-Israeli soldiers. Falconer has specific responsibility for British policy towards the Middle East.

With the UK government yet to respond to the open letter, *Declassified* doorstepped Falconer while he walked from the Foreign Office to Parliament, asking him: "Are you worried that war criminals might be walking the streets of Britain?"

Watch Hamish Falconer avoid our questions

“I’m just on my way to answer an urgent question in the House of Commons so you’ll hear from me first there,” Falconer responded, with half an hour to spare before he was due in Parliament.

Declassified probed further: “Are you going to talk about what you are doing to stop British nationals fighting in the Israeli army in Gaza?”

“I’ll be answering questions from my colleagues shortly so you’ll be able to catch me there rather than here,” Falconer replied, as he began to cross Whitehall instead of stopping to talk.

“There’s more than 2,000 British nationals who’ve fought in the Israeli army since 2023,” *Declassified* continued as Falconer darted in front of a bus.

“Are you not worried that some of them might have come back to the UK? Are you doing enough to try and screen British nationals who’ve fought for Israel?”

“I’ll be answering I’m sure I’ll be able to answer a range of questions in parliament in a second so I suggest you tune in to BBC Parliament,” Falconer said, walking briskly along Derby Gate.

“I’ve seen the order list. I don’t think this is on the list though is it? I mean it’s a fairly straightforward question,” *Declassified* continued.

“Why aren’t you stopping British nationals fighting for Israel while the UN says there’s a genocide going on? Isn’t that a fairly reasonable thing for the Foreign Office to do?”

“I suggest your viewers tune into BBC Parliament and they’ll be able to see lots of questions,” Falconer said, as he rushed through a security gate to enter the Palace of Westminster.

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Falconer flanked by Miller and Alex Morris. (Photo: Hanna-Johara Dokal / Declassified UK)

Operation Tango

Although Falconer was due to speak in Parliament about Israel, the debate focused on illegal settlements in the West Bank.

There was no mention of British nationals fighting in the IDF.

This is despite a UN commission warning last month that countries like Britain, which are members of the International Criminal Court, should do more to prosecute dual nationals in the IDF.

UN commissioner Chris Sidoti said: "Anyone who has served in the Israeli Defence Forces in Gaza since October 2023 must be considered a suspect for the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of genocide."

Declassified has previously identified 15 British nationals fighting for the IDF including men who filmed themselves rummaging through women's underwear drawers in Gaza and posting footage of entire neighbourhoods being destroyed.

Ten Britons who served in the IDF were reported to the Met Police war crimes unit last year, but detectives have subsequently refused to open an investigation.

This is in sharp contrast with earlier efforts Britain has sometimes made to punish war crimes.

Tony Blair's Labour government sent the SAS to hunt down Bosnian-Serb war criminals in the former Yugoslavia and bring them to justice under Operation Tango.



Hamish Falconer's father, Charlie, sits in the House of Lords and was Tony Blair's flatmate. (Photo: Jeff Gilbert / Alamy)

Loophole

However, Britain has [no effective anti-mercenary legislation](#) to stop UK nationals fighting for foreign powers.

When the most relevant law, the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870, was reviewed in [parliament](#) in 1976, it emerged no one had been convicted under it.

Labour's then prime minister Harold Wilson noted that a number of Margaret Thatcher's constituents in Finchley "went to fight for Israel, either because they were Israeli students in Britain perhaps on the reserve list or because they wanted to go to the land which is the foundation of their faith. That, I am sure, is understood by everyone."

Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, former Conservative cabinet minister, has said: "The only reason we allow the loophole to exist is because of the IDF."

One UK diplomat said in the 1970s that the lack of anti-mercenary legislation meant the government could "shrug our shoulders and say we have no power to stop them."

Britain has never signed the United Nations convention against mercenaries. It [lobbied](#) to weaken the treaty so recruitment of Nepalese citizens into the British army's Gurkha brigade would not be jeopardised.

Royal Air Force personnel seconded to BAE Systems worked within Saudi Arabia's air force during its bombardment of Yemen from 2015-2022. That conflict led to the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

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