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Israel Wants Tony Blair as Humanitarian Coordinator in Gaza

On November 12, Israeli outlet Ynet reported that Israel was mulling hiring former U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair as humanitarian coordinator for Gaza to address international outrage over excessive civilian casualties in the besieged enclave.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly wishes to leverage Blair's diplomatic experience in the region to boost Israel's military campaign and tackle international demands for a ceasefire amid thousands of civilian deaths. After stepping down as leader of the U.K., Blair served as envoy to Israel and Palestine for the Middle East Quartet, comprising the United States, the EU, the UN, and Russia.



AP Images
Tony Blair

Although the precise scope of Blair's proposed role has yet to be decided, it would concentrate on "providing medical treatment and medicines, and on the possibility of evacuating the wounded and sick from the [Gaza] Strip," per the Ynet report.

Blair's office told the outlet that although he has an office in Israel and has had "conversations with people in the region and other places in order to see what can be done" in terms of the conflict, "he has not been given or offered a position" by Netanyahu's office.

Nonetheless, a spokesperson verified that he is "discussing the situation" and is open to the possibility.

Following Hamas' October 7 assault on Israel, Blair published a statement on X (formerly Twitter) proclaiming that "decades of conventional Western diplomacy around the Israeli/Palestinian issue will need to be fundamentally re-thought" as the current situation had only caused "grief and tragedy" for both Israel and Gaza.

While he backed the blockade of Gaza following Hamas' election victory in 2006, Blair admitted in 2017 that Israel and its western allies had been wrong in cutting the militant group off, contending in hindsight that they should have attempted dialogue with the group instead.

The former prime minister's appointment as peace envoy for the Quartet in 2007 was highly contentious owing to his having steered the U.K. into a catastrophic war with Iraq in 2003. The New Labour standard-bearer dodged prosecution for war crimes after an official inquiry led by Sir John Chilcot discovered he disregarded warnings about the dangers of military action. It also found he deliberately amplified the threat posed by Saddam Hussein and his alleged weapons of mass destruction to participate in the American-led invasion.

Many in the U.K. — a third of those surveyed in 2017 — still think that Blair should be tried as a war criminal. Likewise, Hans Blix, the UN weapons inspector whose findings that Hussein did not have



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WMD were set aside in favor of going to war, voiced his sentiments that Blair should be tried as well.

In April this year, documents [published](#) by Declassified UK revealed that Blair also ordered the 1998 bombing of Iraq despite repeated warnings that such a move was unlawful. (When the U.K. invaded Iraq in 2003, Blair followed the same strategy, maintaining that illegal military action was legal.)

The United States and U.K. conducted a four-day bombing campaign against Iraq in December 1998, after then-U.S. President Bill Clinton slammed Saddam Hussein for violating commitments to the UN and manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. Up to 1,400 Iraqi soldiers were killed in strikes on around 100 military facilities.

Before the bombings, Blair was repeatedly advised that using force against Iraq would be illegal without a resolution from the UN Security Council, based on documents from the National Archives quoted by [Declassified UK](#), an investigative outlet that sheds light on Britain's military and intelligence agencies.

Attorney General John Morris allegedly told Blair in November 1997 that getting a statement from the Security Council would be "an essential precondition" to military action, whereas Blair's private secretary, John Holmes, informed the prime minister that British law officers and Foreign Secretary Robin Cook had a "serious problem about using force unless the Security Council declares that Iraq is in 'material breach' of previous resolutions."

When the law officers declined to let the military draw up targeting plans, Blair reportedly wrote to Holmes, stating that he found their argument "unconvincing."

Throughout 1998, Blair continuously received warnings, the report continued, with Cook's private secretary writing to Holmes that February to caution that "the negative implications for international support if we resort to military action without a new resolution would be serious."

When Blair declared military action to Parliament in November, he said, "I have no doubt that we have the proper legal authority, as it is contained in successive Security Council resolution documents." British officials stated that a 1990 resolution authorizing UN members to force Hussein's army out of Kuwait gave them permission to intervene again in Iraq, an argument that only the United States, Japan, and Portugal backed.

Based on the documents, Blair saw bombing Iraq as critical to keeping close ties with Clinton. In a meeting with advisors in November, he supposedly argued that failing to bomb Iraq would cause "extreme damage" to U.S.-U.K. relations. That same day, even as his own aides insisted that intervention was illegal, Blair told Clinton that the United States "could count on our support."

Five years later, Blair found himself in similar circumstances when he falsely [claimed](#) that Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and invoked earlier Security Council resolutions to justify a British invasion of Iraq. Once more, Blair was [warned](#) by his attorney general that military action would breach international law, but he still insisted on doing so.

More than 10 years later, a public inquiry [found](#) that the legal case for the invasion was "far from satisfactory," while then-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had said from the start that the war was "illegal."

Meanwhile, on November 13, Israel's Finance Ministry revealed that it has raised about 30 billion shekels (\$7.8 billion) in debt since the start of the conflict with Hamas.

The ministry claimed that \$4.1 billion of that amount was dollar-denominated debt raised in issuances



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in international markets.

The Israeli government has incurred considerable expenses to bankroll its military and to compensate businesses near the border with Gaza, as well as the families of victims and hostages taken by Hamas. Consequently, Israel is experiencing a record budget deficit, which last month soared to \$6 billion, a more than seven-fold increase compared to one year ago.

The Finance Ministry has also unveiled plans to borrow 75 percent more in November than last month. Meanwhile, Bank of Israel Governor Amir Yaron has called on the government to balance “supporting the economy and maintaining a sound fiscal position.”

Netanyahu’s pledge to “open the taps” to help those affected by the conflict with Hamas will significantly drive up the deficit and debt-to-GDP ratio through 2024, economists have stated.

In October, international credit rating agency S&P cut Israel’s rating from “stable” to “negative.” It was followed by Fitch, which has placed Israel on negative ratings watch, warning that a prolonged conflict could lead to a marked deterioration of Israel’s credit score. Moody’s has also said it is considering a possible downgrade for Israel.



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