

# [***The UK is stepping up lawmakers' security as tensions flare over the Israel-Hamas war***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BF6-NT01-JC5B-G546-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

LONDON — The British government said Wednesday that it is stepping up security for lawmakers after politicians reported threats and intimidation connected to the [*Israel-Hamas war.*](https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war)

The Home Office said a 31 million-pound fund will give every lawmaker a “dedicated named police contact” and provide money for those facing threats to pay for private security protection.

The government said some of the money will go more broadly to protecting Britain’s “democratic processes from intimidation, disruption or subversion” ahead of a general election later this year. The fund includes money for extra police patrols in areas where tensions are high.

The announcement got a mixed reception. Some legislators said the heightened security measures didn’t address the underlying reasons why ***politics*** has grown more toxic. Anti-war activists claimed the government was trying to stifle protest and lumping peaceful demonstrators in with violent extremists.

British lawmakers have a tradition of meeting regularly with constituents in their local communities, but security has been tightened after several attacks in the last decade. In 2016, Labour lawmaker Jo Cox [*was killed*](https://apnews.com/general-news-31562654870142838bf6d17661923678) by a far-right extremist, and Conservative David Amess [*was murdered*](https://apnews.com/article/europe-health-terrorism-congress-d9ccf7c008942aa6f19ae60608ac5683) in 2021 by an attacker inspired by the Islamic State group.

In 2017 an Islamic State-inspired extremist [*killed four people*](https://apnews.com/international-news-general-news-55eff8a789454fe0b2ad5f40ac00c444) with a vehicle on Westminster Bridge before stabbing a police officer to death at the gates of Parliament. The following year a neo-Nazi [*pleaded guilty*](https://apnews.com/general-news-cded9dd47f404d52a017e956fe048692) to plotting to kill a Labour lawmaker.

[*Divisions over the conflict in Gaza*](https://apnews.com/article/britain-parliament-gaza-debate-speaker-lindsay-hoyle-406d7a3e1cb53aa110297f10466dbfa2) have [*convulsed British* ***politics***](https://apnews.com/article/uk-sunak-london-mayor-islamophobia-396a9c80b26f7e0e64975ef241603eb5), with some lawmakers saying they fear for their safety after receiving threats over their positions on the war. Reports of both antisemitic and anti-Muslim abuse in Britain have soared since Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel, which triggered Israel’s invasion of Gaza.

A debate last week in the House of Commons on whether to call for a cease-fire [*descended into chaos*](https://apnews.com/article/uk-parliament-gaza-cease-fire-vote-c394d17657c32ab861b3a121d0954f18) amid allegations the speaker of the house had bent parliamentary rules in response to pressure from pro-Palestinian activists.

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators protested at the house of a Conservative lawmaker earlier this month, while environmental activists have targeted Sunak's family home in northern England.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak suspended [*Conservative lawmaker Lee Anderson*](https://apnews.com/article/uk-sunak-london-mayor-islamophobia-396a9c80b26f7e0e64975ef241603eb5) for saying Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, who is Muslim, was controlled by Islamists and had allowed them to take charge of the city.

Conservative lawmaker Mike Freer — who has announced he is is [*stepping down*](https://apnews.com/article/uk-lawmaker-freer-quit-death-threats-11661c51b5f447b76f9401b8b5074fda) because of abuse and death threats linked to his support for Israel — said the money announced Wednesday was only “dealing with the symptom” rather than “going to the root cause” of why people feel emboldened to attack politicians.

“Security is welcome,” Freer told Times Radio. “But frankly, unless you get to the root cause, then you’re just going to have a ring of steel around MPs. And our whole style of democracy changes.”

Home Secretary James Cleverly called on pro-Palestinian demonstrators to halt the [*mass protests*](https://apnews.com/article/london-israel-palestinians-protests-70dbc6345ce40c5311f9bd2b943328d2) that have drawn hundreds of thousands of people to central London almost weekly to call for a cease-fire in a conflict that has killed close to 30,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

Israel says Hamas killed 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians, and abducted roughly 250, in the Oct. 7 attack.

The protests have been overwhelmingly peaceful, though there have dozens of arrests over signs and chants allegedly supporting Hamas, a banned organization in Britain. Jewish organizations and many lawmakers say the mass marches have created an intimidating atmosphere for Jewish Londoners — though members of the Jewish community have been among those on pro-cease-fire marches.

“I genuinely don’t know what these regular protests are seeking to achieve,” Cleverly told the Times of London in an interview published Wednesday. “They have made their position clear, we recognize that there are many people in the U.K. that hold that position. We respect that, but the U.K. government’s position is a disagreement with that for very practical, well thought-out reasons.”

The government says it supports an immediate “humanitarian pause” in the fighting but says a permanent cease-fire can only happen if Hamas frees all Israeli hostages and relinquishes control of Gaza.

Ben Jamal, director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, which has organized many protests, said Cleverly’s comments showed the government did not understand the role of protest “as an important part of the democratic process.”

“They regard it as a hindrance, something that should be suppressed,” Jamal said.

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