

Britain's Middle East minister implies U.S. fails to understand Palestinian plight

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A British minister has said the United States needs to show greater understanding of the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in a rare criticism of Britain's closest ally.

Alistair Burt, minister of state for the Middle East, made the comments on Tuesday during a debate in parliament on Monday's opening of the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem and the bloodshed it triggered in Gaza.

"The U.S. will remain a central part of what needs to happen in Israel, but it does need to give a greater sense of understanding of some of the underlying issues," Burt said.

Like almost all other nations, and especially most of its Western allies, Britain disagrees with U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv.

Israeli troops shot dead dozens of Palestinian protesters on Monday at the Gaza border, as the opening of the embassy fuelled a campaign of protests that had been organised to demand a right for Palestinian refugees to have the right of return to their former lands, which now lie inside Israel.

During the debate in the British parliament, many lawmakers condemned Israel's use of live fire against protesters. Some also strongly criticised U.S. policy and said Trump's visit to Britain in July should be cancelled.

Burt rejected that idea, but suggested London would be trying to get a critical message across to Washington.

"In dealing with the United States, a valued partner in the region but one that does not always get it right, we are very clear and very direct and we hope that the events of the last days will lead people to realise that this (Israeli-Palestinian conflict) cannot be managed, cannot simply drift, will not go away of its own accord," he said.

Britain regards its friendship with the United States as a "special relationship" and rarely voices public criticism of Washington. The relationship has taken on added importance for London as Britain prepares to exit the European Union.

However, ties have been tested under Trump's administration because of policy differences on issues including his decision to withdraw from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. Plans for a full state visit to Britain by the U.S. leader appear to be on indefinite hold, with a lower-key working visit set for July.

Prime Minister Theresa May's government has faced repeated criticism over what political opponents have portrayed as fruitless efforts to cosy up to Trump.

May herself was criticised in January 2017 for being too hasty in offering Trump a full state visit just days after his inauguration. During a recent visit to Washington, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson was mocked at home for appearing on "Fox and Friends", a U.S. TV show liked by the president, in an apparent attempt to appeal to Trump over the Iran policy. Johnson had not been offered a face-to-face meeting with Trump.