Tzipi Livni Arrest Warrant Prompts Israeli Government Travel 'Ban'

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<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/dec/15/tzipi-livni-arrest-warrant-israeli>

Israel hit back at Britain today over the [arrest warrant issued for former foreign minister Tzipi Livni](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/14/tzipi-livni-israel-gaza-arrest) for alleged war crimes, warning that until the matter was resolved senior officials would not be visiting the UK.

Israelis prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, called the warrant absurd, the Ynet website reported.

The British ambassador, Tom Phillips, was summoned to the foreign ministry in Jerusalem where a senior Israeli official told him the row over Livni meant that Britain's ability to play a role in the Middle East peace process had been damaged.

The row erupted at the weekend when Westminster magistrates court issued an unprecedented warrant for the arrest of Livni, now leader of the opposition Kadima party, who was foreign minister and a member of the war cabinet during the [Gaza](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/gaza) offensive earlier this year.

The warrant was withdrawn amidst huge embarassment when it was discovered she was not in the UK.

The fact that it was issued in error – at the request of lawyers acting for Palestinian victims of the [Gaza](http://www.theguardian.com/world/gaza) war – did nothing to quell Israeli anger. Israel's foreign ministry called it a cynical move, and former defence minister Shaul Mofaz urged the recall of Israel's ambassador to Britain "for consultations" in Jerusalem.

Ron Prosor, the ambassador, told [Israel](http://www.theguardian.com/world/israel) Army Radio: "The current situation has become intolerable, it is time that it changed. I am convinced that the British government will understand that it is time to react and not content itself with declarations."

Israeli media reported that senior government officials would not visit the UK until Britain addressed the issue.

Livni had been due to attend a conference in London but her office said she had cancelled her attendance two weeks ago. Palestinian sources claimed to have seen her at the event and alerted the lawyers who were seeking the warrant.

"The lack of determined and immediate action to correct this distortion harms the relations between the two countries," the foreign ministry said. "If Israeli leaders cannot visit Britain in a dignified manner, it will naturally be a real obstacle to Britain's desire to have an active role in the peace process in the Middle East."

It said Israel and Britain were engaged in a "common struggle against international terrorism", and that British soldiers were trying to root out terrorism on several fronts around the world.

Palestinian officials and an Israeli human rights organisation say about 1,400 people, mostly civilians, were killed in the Gaza offensive. Israel says 1,166 Palestinians died and claims most were combatants. Israel says it acted in self-defence against Hamas rockets from Gaza. Thirteen Israelis died.

In September, pro-Palestinian lawyers attempted to invoke "universal jurisdiction" to arrest Ehud Barak, Israel's defence minister during the war and afterwards. Barak's status as a serving cabinet minister gave him diplomatic immunity.

In 2005, a retired Israeli general, Doron Almog, returned to Israel after landing in London because he was tipped off that police planned to arrest him. The warrant for Almog – who allegedly oversaw the bombing of a Gaza building in which 14 people were killed – was later cancelled.

Other Israeli leaders, including former military chief Moshe Yaalon and ex-Shin Bet security chief Avi Dichter, have cancelled trips to Britain in recent years for the same reason.