UK Court Issues, Then Revokes, Arrest Warrant for Israel Ex-Foreign Minister

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A British magistrate court issued an arrest warrant Monday for Israel's opposition chairwoman on war crimes charges relating to Israel's [Gaza offensive](http://jurist.org/jurist_search.php?q=gaza) [JURIST news archive] earlier this year, but withdrew the warrant after discovering she wasn't in the country. Former Israeli foreign minister [Tzipi Livni](http://tzipilivni.co.il/) [official website, in Hebrew] was scheduled to speak at the Jewish National Fund Vision 2010 conference in London over the weekend, but quietly canceled her travel plans, apparently [fearing possible arrest](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1134978.html). [*Haaretz* report]. Israeli officials, including [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/) [official website], are [outraged](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jTqdQWror3SGh5NBgEr9XYIGoqYgD9CJQJN01) [AP report] at the action and fear the move will hamper Britain's role in Middle East peace negotiations. Israel's [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA) (MFA) [official website] [issued a statement](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/About%2Bthe%2BMinistry/MFA%2BSpokesman/2009/Press%2Breleases/Israel_rejects_attempts_to_exploit_British_courts_against_Tzipi_Livni_15_Dec_2009.htm) [press release] condemning the warrant. According to the statement, the MFA is concerned the action "seriously compromises Britain's ability to play the active role in the Middle East peace process that it desires." It also expressed Israel's desire for future compromises with the country saying Israel and Britain are "both engaged in a common struggle against the forces of international terror."

In October, [Vice Prime Minister Moshe Yaalon](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2002/11/Lieutenant-General%20Moshe%20Ya-alon) [official profile] [decided to call off](http://jurist.org/paperchase/2009/10/israel-cabinet-minister-cancels-uk-trip.php) [JURIST report] a scheduled trip to attend a fundraising event for the Jewish National Fund after legal advisers from the Israeli MFA said that he may be arrested over his involvement in a 2002 airstrike that killed Hamas leader Salah Shehadeh and 14 civilians. Just one week earlier, Palestinian officials [attempted](http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1254163541545&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull) [Jerusalem Post report] to have [Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak](http://www.mod.gov.il/pages/about_office/minister.asp) [official profile, in Hebrew] arrested on charges of war crimes while he was in Britain for a meeting with UK government leaders, but the British court rejected the petition citing Barak's diplomatic immunity. Israeli officials are concerned about the possibility of being charged with war crimes in Britain and other foreign countries based on the theory of [universal jurisdiction](http://www.amnesty.org/en/international-justice/issues/universal-jurisdiction) [AI backgrounder], which allows a country to prosecute serious crimes against humanity no matter where the activity takes place.