Israel Officers Abandon UK Visit Fearing War Crimes Arrest

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By Andrea Bottorff

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http://jurist.org/paperchase/2010/01/israel-officers-abandon-uk-visit.php

JURIST] Israeli officials said Tuesday that a military delegation had canceled a trip to the UK over fears that they would be arrested on war crimes charges for their involvement in last year's [Operation Cast Lead](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/operation-cast-lead.htm) [Global Security Backgrounder] in the Gaza Strip. Israeli [Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Danny Ayalon](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Personalities/From%2BA-Z/Daniel_Ayalon.htm) [official profile] met Tuesday in Jerusalem with UK [Attorney General Patricia Janet Scotland](http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.uk/TheLawOfficers/Pages/AttorneyGeneralBiog.aspx) [official profile] to[challenge](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/About%2Bthe%2BMinistry/MFA%2BSpokesman/2010/Deputy-FM-Ayalon-meets-with-British-Attorney-General-5-Jan-2010.htm) [press release] several British arrest warrants for Israeli politicians and military officials, stating that the warrants are straining Israeli-British foreign relations. The arrest warrants are the result of Palestinian plaintiffs working with British lawyers to file charges against Israeli officials. Scotland, who also [gave a speech](http://www.huji.ac.il/cgi-bin/dovrut/dovrut_search_eng.pl?mesge126268782732688760)[press release] on Tuesday at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, told Ayalon that UK officials were working to resolve the issue and protect senior officials traveling to the UK.

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. Last month, Former Israeli foreign minister [Tzipi Livni](http://tzipilivni.co.il/) [official website, in Hebrew] [canceled a UK trip](http://jurist.org/paperchase/2009/12/uk-court-issues-then-revokes-arrest.php) [JURIST report] after a British magistrate court issued, and later revoked, an arrest warrant for her on war crimes charges relating to Israel's Gaza offensive. 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] [called off](http://jurist.org/paperchase/2009/10/israel-cabinet-minister-cancels-uk-trip.php) [JURIST report] a scheduled trip to the UK after legal advisers from the Israeli [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA) [official website] said that he may be arrested over his involvement in a 2002 airstrike that killed a Hamas leader 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.