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UK RAF Planes Aid Israeli Hostage Search in Gaza

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British military aircraft have been conducting surveillance missions over Gaza to assist Israel in locating hostages captured by Hamas during the October 2023 attacks, the Ministry of Defence has confirmed.

Since early December 2023, Royal Air Force (RAF) Shadow R1 aircraft have flown hundreds of unarmed reconnaissance operations across the region. These aircraft are equipped with

advanced sensors capable of monitoring ground movement, identifying vehicles and structures, and detecting individual activity. This intelligence is selectively shared with Israeli authorities, with the MoD stressing it is used exclusively for hostage recovery.

A Ministry of Defence spokesperson said: “Since early December 2023, the RAF has routinely conducted unarmed surveillance flights over Gaza for the sole purpose of locating hostages. The UK controls what information is passed to Israeli authorities, and only information relating to hostage rescue will be passed to the relevant authority.”

The missions have continued despite mounting international criticism of Israel’s military campaign. Recent reports in Israeli media suggest Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is considering a full ground takeover of Gaza. One unnamed Israeli official was quoted as saying: “The die has been cast. We’re going for the full conquest of the Gaza Strip and defeating Hamas.”

Of the estimated 50 hostages still being held, around 20 are believed to be alive. Families of those kidnapped have voiced fears that expanding military operations could endanger the lives of their loved ones.

Meanwhile, UK-Israel relations have become increasingly strained. The current UK Government has imposed sanctions on several Israeli ministers and warned it may back Palestinian statehood recognition at the United Nations if humanitarian conditions in Gaza do not improve.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy said last month he was “sickened” by reports of Israeli troops allegedly opening fire at Palestinians during aid distribution. His remarks followed continued UK military cooperation with Israel in the form of intelligence-sharing to help locate hostages.

Despite the political posturing from Westminster, UK surveillance flights have remained consistent. According to a report by The Times, the RAF’s Shadow R1 aircraft that had been operating in the region has returned to the UK. However, it is unclear what aircraft may now be fulfilling the intelligence-gathering role. The Ministry of Defence has not signalled any halt to operations.

These RAF missions reflect an ongoing military contribution focused on hostage recovery, even as diplomatic tensions rise. The UK’s stated position remains that its involvement is

limited strictly to identifying hostages and sharing only relevant information to facilitate their rescue.