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**Vikram Dodd**  
**Friday February 3, 2006**  
[The Guardian](#)

The government is considering weakening laws designed to capture alleged war criminals and torturers who enter Britain, after pressure from the Israeli government, the Guardian has learned.

The changes would bar individuals from seeking international warrants for the arrest of people suspected of serious human rights abuses. The government has confirmed that Israeli officials have lobbied for changes in the law, which has kept some of their military officials away from Britain in case there should be an attempt to arrest them.

The proposals follow Israeli anger after an attempt was made to arrest one of their senior retired generals, Doron Almog, at Heathrow last September. He was tipped off that police were waiting to arrest him for alleged war crimes in Gaza. He stayed on the El Al plane and flew back to Israel. The warrant was issued by Bow Street magistrates, central London, after an application from lawyers representing

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Palestinians who say they suffered because of the Israeli general's alleged illegal orders.

Ministers are said to believe the law is too unpredictable and can risk jeopardising international relations. The warrant naming General Almog for war crimes is believed to be the first of its kind issued in Britain against an Israeli national over conduct in the Palestinian conflict. A British official confirmed that ministers were examining stopping private individuals applying to magistrates for prosecutions over war crimes, genocide and torture, which in turn leads to international arrest warrants being granted.

Under international law, Britain has a duty to arrest and prosecute alleged war crimes suspects if they arrive on its territory, even though the alleged offences occurred overseas.

Gen Almog is alleged to have ordered the destruction of 59 Palestinian civilian homes in revenge for the death of Israeli soldiers, in breach of the Geneva conventions.

Since last September, Israeli officials have met twice with Home Office officials and Foreign Office representatives regarding the attempted arrest. The government has denied claims that US officials want the British law changed, fearing their officials could be arrested for alleged human rights abuses.

Gen Almog said he was tipped off by the Israeli military attache in London, who boarded his plane at Heathrow. Police rejected demands to investigate who tipped off the general, saying in a letter seen by the Guardian from Peter Clarke, the national anti-terrorism coordinator, that they lacked the resources to do so.

Daniel Machover, the solicitor who brought the prosecution, has made an official complaint about the lack of an investigation and police "failure" to board Gen Almog's

plane at Heathrow. Mr Machover said any change would weaken the government's claim to be resolute in fighting serious human rights abuses.

He said; "If the UK goes ahead and bends to Israeli pressure, while Israel continues its universally condemned illegal practices, this will sent the worst possible signal to the Israeli army. The British government is completely obsessed with controlling these processes."

Several Labour backbenchers have tabled questions, including Phyllis Starkey, MP for Milton Keynes South West, who said: "The obvious concern is the way in which the Israeli government in particular seems to be given quite favoured access to interfere in UK domestic policy."

The government says any change would be referred back to parliament. The foreign secretary, Jack Straw, apologised to his Israeli counterpart over the attempted arrest, and the warrant has been withdrawn.

A Home Office spokeswoman said: "The government is carefully considering the implications of the General Almog case. The government is currently considering a range of matters relating to the issuing of arrest warrants in international cases, but has not yet concluded what changes, if any, are required. There have been two meetings by home officials with Israeli officials regarding this matter. The Home Office has not been in contact with US officials on this matter."

A spokeswoman for the Israeli embassy in London confirmed meetings with British officials and said: "We would like to find a solution to this unacceptable situation." She added that the right of individuals in Britain to obtain warrants in cases of alleged war crimes had been abused. "This has been used by people to promote their own agenda, and that's the worry we're expressing."

It was reported that shortly after the attempt to arrest Gen Almog, the matter was discussed by the Israeli and British prime ministers at a meeting of the UN in New York.

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