

UK Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer reaffirms support for Israel's genocidal war on Gaza

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UK Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has responded to internal dissent in his party and massive public hostility to his support for Israel's genocidal war on Gaza by declaring in a speech Monday that there must be no ceasefire.

Starmer spoke in London at Chatham House, an imperialist foreign policy think-tank, after more than three weeks of Israeli bombardment of Gaza's besieged population.

He has been unable to quell a tidal wave of anger since an October 11 statement on LBC Radio that Israel had the right to continue bombing Gaza and cutting off electricity and water to its population of over 2 million. Tuesday's speech was billed as an effort to contain a growing rebellion in Labour's ranks and even in the higher echelons of the party, calling for a ceasefire.

The crisis has already seen the resignations of 23 councillors—with Labour losing control of one council, Oxford, and more than 60 Labour MPs (over a quarter) either issuing statements calling for a ceasefire or signing an Early Day Motion calling for a cessation of hostilities. The EDM was authored by Labour "left" Socialist Campaign Group secretary Richard Burgon, to try and restore Labour's credibility and stem the loss of millions of votes, particularly in areas with a large Muslim population.

Sadiq Khan and Andy Burnham, the Labour mayors of London and Greater Manchester, and Anas Sarwar, the party's leader in Scotland, are also calling for a ceasefire.

Fully 13 of Starmer's own shadow cabinet, some with constituencies with large Muslim populations such as Jess Phillips, have joined them.

Demonstrators, many of them Jewish, protested outside Chatham House.

None of this moved Starmer, a man of the state, in the

slightest. He spoke having removed the party whip 24 hours earlier from Andy McDonald MP for three months pending an investigation. He had made a speech at Saturday's anti-war rally in London in which he stated, "We will not rest until we have justice. Until all people, Israelis and Palestinians between the river and the sea can live in peaceful liberty."

Portrayed by McDonald as a means of turning a "contentious" demand into a positive affirmation of Arab/Jewish unity, the response of a Labour spokesperson could have come out of the mouth of fascistic Conservative government Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who is seeking to ban chants including the words "from the river to the sea" as an anti-Semitic "hate crime". McDonald's words were described as "deeply offensive, particularly at a time of rising anti-Semitism which has left Jewish people fearful for their safety."

In his speech Starmer said, "I understand calls for a ceasefire, but it is not the correct position... a ceasefire always freezes any conflict in the state where it currently lies. And as we speak, that would leave Hamas with the infrastructure and the capability to carry out the sort of attack we saw on October the 7th."

With Gaza suffering a savage invasion, Starmer claimed that the Hamas attacks "are still ongoing. Hostages who should be released—still held."

Declaring he didn't want "another round" of "hand-wringing", Starmer combined fulsome backing for the bombing of Gaza with claims that "what we all want to see in Gaza" is "the urgent alleviation of Palestinian suffering."

Israel was undertaking the "right to self-defence of any nation which suffers terrorism on this scale" and had to be defended, but this had to be measured "alongside the basic human rights of innocent

Palestinians caught, once again, in the crossfire.”

This was all said to back “our current calls for pauses in the fighting for clear and specific humanitarian purposes”, by which Starmer refers to the face saving excuse for backing genocide laid down by the Biden administration, that is “shared by our major allies, in the US and the EU [European Union]”.

Starmer, a former human rights lawyer, knows he is endorsing war crimes and so made a point of declaring that “Our position and our counsel has always been that Israel must submit to the rules of international law. The right to self-defence is fundamental but it is not a blank cheque.”

But a blank cheque is precisely what has been provided and Starmer knows it. A few hours after Starmer spoke, Israel committed another vast war crime in bombing the Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza with hundreds killed and/or wounded.

In a Q&A following the speech, Starmer refused to say whether he thought Israel was acting in accordance with international law: “I think it’s unwise for politicians to sit on stages like this and... pronounce which acts may or may not be in accordance with international law... I come with the benefit of a lawyer of having litigated about issues like this in the past. And in my experience, it’d often take weeks or months to assimilate the evidence and to then work out whether there may or may not have been a breach of international law.”

No such caution has ever suggested itself to Starmer in the past. Interviewed by Sky News on March 13, 2022—just 18 days after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine—he was asked, “Is Vladimir Putin a war criminal?” Having signed up to NATO’s de facto war against Moscow, he replied, “Yes. What I’ve seen already amounts to war crimes, particularly the awful attacks on civilians. This is something that we need to make clear now so that those who are involved now know what the consequences are.”

Following Tuesday’s speech Starmer had to skulk out of the back door of Chatham House into a waiting car, as protesters denounced him as a “war criminal” and chanted “Keir Starmer you can’t hide; we charge you with genocide”, and “Keir Starmer you’re a liar, we demand a ceasefire”.

Millions of workers and youth in Britain want Israel’s barbaric war to end and are supportive of the

ceasefire demand. But this will never be achieved by calls directed at war criminals like Starmer. The *World Socialist Web Site* made clear in its October 27 statement, “A call to the working class and youth: Stop the imperialist-Zionist genocide in Gaza!” the only basis for stopping the slaughter:

“Workers must demand an immediate halt to the Israeli bombing of Gaza and the demobilization of all Israeli troops and their withdrawal from the border with Gaza. The siege on Gaza must be ended, and food, water, electricity, medical care and all other necessities must be made available immediately. Netanyahu, Scholz, Biden, Sunak, Meloni, Macron, and all the leading figures in the US-NATO axis must be prosecuted for their complicity in genocide and crimes against humanity.”

To that list of war criminals is added Keir Starmer.

The statement concluded, “A mass movement of workers must be directed against all the capitalist governments and political parties of the ruling class. Workers in the Middle East, moreover, should not allow their defense of the Palestinians to be controlled by their own bourgeois governments, which have cultivated relations with Israel and isolated and betrayed the Palestinians.”



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