

UK: Sunak and Starmer united in support of war in the Middle East

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Britain's Conservative government Prime Minister Rishi Sunak appeared in Parliament Monday to justify launching missile strikes against the Houthis in Yemen last Thursday night, alongside the United States.

Quickly stating that it had not been "possible to bring this matter to the House in advance," Sunak attempted to pull the wool over the public's eyes about the aggressive and dangerous course embarked upon.

"This action was taken in self-defence. It was limited, not escalatory." The Royal Navy was in the Red Sea solely "to protect freedom of navigation". Nobody should "fall for the malign narrative that this is about Israel and Gaza... This action is completely unrelated to those issues."

This is a brazen lie. The massive deployment of military force to the region by the US and the UK is aimed at safeguarding the Israeli army carrying out a genocide in Gaza, provoking conflict with Iranian-backed forces in the region, and preparing war against these forces and Iran itself, repeatedly denounced in the debate, as a stepping stone to an escalation against Russia and China.

That the involvement of British and American imperialism in the Middle East is part of a global military campaign was confirmed by the second part of Sunak's statement. "If our adversaries think that they can distract us from helping Ukraine by threatening international security elsewhere," said the prime minister, "they could not be more wrong."

Referring to his visit to Kyiv last Friday, Sunak reiterated that the UK government "will stand with Ukraine today, tomorrow and for as long as it takes." British military support for NATO's proxy forces in Ukraine would "increase this year" to "the single biggest package of defence aid to Ukraine since the war began of £2.5 billion." This will take total UK support to Ukraine to £12 billion.

Sunak added provocatively, "Ukraine's rightful place is

in NATO."

Opposition Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer endorsed everything Sunak said, asking nothing of the prime minister other than that he proceed according to plan.

Confirming again in the House of Commons "that Labour backs this targeted action to reinforce maritime security in the Red Sea," he asked Sunak to confirm the success of the operation, his intentions going forward, and if "where possible" he would bring plans for "sustained" military action "before this House," assuring the Tory prime minister, "Scrutiny is not the enemy of strategy."

Starmer echoed Sunak's statement in warning of the UK's "rightful actions" being "used as an excuse by those who seek to expand violence throughout the wider region," naturally a reference not to Israel, the US and the UK, but any opposition to their genocide against the Palestinians and broader predatory ambitions.

He commended the British armed forces for their "highest professionalism and bravery... We thank them, we are proud of them. They continue to show that Britain is a force for good."

"As does," he continued, "the UK's unwavering unity in support of Ukraine and against Russian aggression." Noting how Labour had "backed all military support," he added, "So, again, we back the prime minister's announcement of £2.5 billion for Ukraine next year." He hoped that Ukraine "in time, will become a full member of NATO."

Sunak had little to do in response, thanking Starmer "for his support of the action that we've taken" in an exchange that was described in understated fashion by *Sky News*' Rob Powell as "a session with a perhaps uncharacteristic level of agreement between the government and opposition."

In fact, it is entirely characteristic. In Parliament on Monday and in the days since the strikes in Yemen,

Starmer has done more to advocate for the government's actions than the government itself.

Last Friday, he fell over himself to declare Labour's support before Sunak had even published the government's legal justification for the strikes.

In an opinion piece published by *The Independent on Sunday*, he said again, "Labour backs the action of recent days," and beat the drums for war with Iran: "The Iranian regime continues to play a destabilising role in the region, as a sponsor of terror." Starmer threatened, "those who seek to damage Britain, to attack its interests or threaten its people should be in no doubt as to the seriousness of our country's resolve in response to their aggression."

He also gave the green light to Sunak to take any other unannounced military action he liked, arguing that "we must retain the flexibility to react with the necessary speed to threats".

The meaning of these words was confirmed in an interview with the BBC's Laura Kuennsberg later that day. Questioned about scrapping a pledge made while running for the Labour leadership to push for a requirement for a parliamentary vote on military action, Starmer dissembled, "There's obviously a huge distinction between an operation, the like of which we've seen in the last few days, and military action, a sustained campaign, military action, usually involving troops on the ground..."

"There will always be urgent situations where parliament can't be consulted beforehand but the principle [is] that, if there's to be a sustained campaign, if we're going to deploy our troops on the ground, that parliament should be informed."

This is blanket support for any war Sunak decides to launch. In the modern era, as demonstrated in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, imperialist wars do not begin with "boots on the ground," but invariably with campaigns of sustained aerial bombardment.

Starmer also disavowed another worthless pledge to stop arms sales to Saudi Arabia, saying that a Labour government would "review the situation."

The same day, Starmer attended the annual conference of the Jewish Labour Movement, where he denounced the few Labour MPs who questioned military action in Yemen as "wrong," and insisted "the Labour Party front bench speaks with one voice... I will never be shy of taking necessary action."

He slandered the half-a-million-strong march for a ceasefire in Gaza which took place Saturday, decrying "hate marching side by side with calls for peace, people

who hate Jews hiding behind people who support the just cause of a Palestinian state." Antisemitism, he said, was "taking a new shape".

Caught up in his antidemocratic fervour, Starmer announced seemingly on the hoof that it was no longer Labour policy to recognise a Palestinian state on day one of government. "The Labour Party has formally changed its position," confirmed Shadow Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Minister Wayne David at the same event.

One day after their party leader's whistle-stop warmongering engagements, the Labour "left" delivered a pathetic performance in Parliament.

Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn mawkishly asked Sunak if he had "any hope for the future that there will be a lessening of conflict rather than the present very rapid increase in it?" Glowing with triumph that this man supposedly represented the spearhead of the anti-war movement, Sunak responded, "I do have hope."

When Apsana Begum linked the strikes with the war on Gaza and asked if Sunak believed "he has any duty towards the British public when making such decisions" as the bombing of Yemen, the prime minister was able to respond, "The leader of the opposition [Starmer] made the point in his remarks, rightly, that we needed to make sure that malign actors elsewhere would not try and distort what we have done for their own purposes," accusing Begum of giving "ammunition to our enemies."

Zarah Sultana, for saying that "Israel's horrifying assault on Gaza" is what is "driving the region's instability", was told that she "would do well to call on Hamas and the Houthis to de-escalate the situation" rather than the UK government.



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