

UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway sanction Smotrich and Ben-Gvir while greenlighting Israel's starvation of Gaza

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In a filthy political manoeuvre, Keir Starmer's UK Labour government, along with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway, has sanctioned two members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's criminal government, Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich.

This was for "inciting extremist violence" against the Palestinians in the West Bank, illegally occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, by far-right settlers and the Israeli military as part of their longstanding campaign to drive out the Palestinians and establish new settlements in the West Bank.

While the two ministers will face travel bans and a freeze on any assets they hold in the five countries, their ministries and the government that fully supports them will not be sanctioned.

In practical terms, the move will not make one iota of difference to the actions of the Israeli government, since the major decisions of the war are being taken by the United States and the European powers, who view Israel's actions in Gaza and throughout the region as a necessary component of the accelerating conflict with Russia, Iran and China.

The UK and its allies are simply trying to divert attention from their refusal to change their unwavering support for Israel. London is not even prepared to stop supplying weapons to the Israeli army. Its persecution of workers, students and young people protesting against the genocide of the Palestinians will continue.

On Tuesday, David Lammy, Britain's Foreign Secretary, declared in a statement issued in conjunction with the foreign ministers of Australia, Canada, New

Zealand and Norway that the decision was the "only way to guarantee security and dignity for Israelis and Palestinians and ensure long term stability in the region".

He said, "Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich have incited extremist violence and serious abuses of Palestinian human rights", citing the 1,900 attacks on Palestinian civilians so far this year, adding, "These actions are not acceptable. This is why we have taken action now—to hold those responsible to account."

Only then did Lammy refer perfunctorily to Gaza, where Israel is slaughtering and starving the Palestinians, saying, "We will strive to achieve an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the immediate release of the remaining hostages by Hamas which can have no future role in the governance of Gaza, a surge in aid and a path to a two-state solution".

Lammy kept his mouth shut about Israel's openly declared policy of using the starvation of the 2.3 million Palestinian population of Gaza as part of its plan to occupy an ethnically cleansed Gaza Strip and was silent about Israel's genocidal slaughter.

When asked in a BBC interview whether he would pressure Netanyahu to sack the ministers, Lammy said it was up to the Israeli government to "make their own determination... I have called for them [the Israeli government] to condemn and disavow these statements and be very clear that they stand against the violence that we've seen in the West Bank, and those that would seek to thwart any possibility of a two-state solution".

The UK government has rejected all calls for further sanctions on Israel for its genocidal war on Gaza, an

end to arms supplies, and the provision of intelligence via near daily flights over Gaza from its military base in Cyprus, in line with the rulings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

In November 2024, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants against Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

Israel has ignored all the rulings against its occupation of Palestinian territories and its homicidal rampage, violating international human rights law with impunity in Gaza and the West Bank. Nevertheless, all the imperialist powers and Middle East regimes have ignored their obligation to uphold the rulings of the UN courts.

The British government has also refused to call Israel's war on Gaza a genocide, despite the well-publicised statements by Netanyahu and his ministers demonstrating genocidal intent. It has ignored the numerous mass protests over the last 20 months opposing the war and Britain's support for it. In this, the government is assured the support of the mainstream media, with the most recent demonstration on May 17, attended by half a million people, not reported, even by the BBC and the *Guardian*.

To condemn Smotrich and Ben-Gvir for inciting violence only in the West Bank underscores the grotesque cynicism involved. Smotrich, for example, recently declared that he would not allow "even a grain of wheat" to enter Gaza. He declaring last month that it would be "entirely destroyed" and its citizens forced to "leave in great numbers to third countries". Smotrich, leader of the Religious Zionism Party, and Ben-Gvir, leader of Jewish Power, are in any case only the most nakedly fascist members of Netanyahu's cabinet, the most right-wing in Israel's 77-year history.

The decision to impose sanctions on Smotrich and Ben-Gvir provoked a furious response from Israel, with Netanyahu accusing the five countries of wanting to help Hamas and being "on the wrong side of history". Foreign Minister Gideon Saar denounced the sanctions as "outrageous" and saying a special government meeting would decide how to respond next week.

Opposition leader from National Unity, Benny Gantz, leapt to the ministers' defence. Writing on X, he called on the five countries to "reconsider", saying, "I vehemently disagree with ministers Smotrich & Ben

Gvir on a wide range of issues, but the imposition of British sanctions on ministers in the one and only democracy in the Middle East, the State of Israel, is a profound moral mistake and sends a dangerous message to terrorists around the world".

Ben-Gvir expressed his gratitude, saying, "Thanks so much, Benny!"

Smotrich, speaking at the inauguration in Hebron of a yet another new illegal settlement, spoke of his "contempt" for the UK's move. "Britain has already tried once to prevent us from settling the cradle of our homeland... We are determined, God willing, to continue building," he said referring to Britain's rule over Palestine before Israel's establishment in 1948.

Smotrich ordered the finance ministry to collapse the Palestinian Authority in retaliation for the sanctions, even though Ramallah was not involved in the decision of the five countries. His ministry is to waive the indemnity that Israeli banks have been given to correspond with Palestinian banks, "against the backdrop of the delegitimization campaign that the Palestinian Authority is leading against the State of Israel worldwide." Almost all exchanges in the West Bank and Gaza are in shekels, Israel's national currency.

The decision to sanction Smotrich and Ben-Gvir prompted a furious response from US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. In "condemning" the move he said, "These sanctions do not advance US-led efforts to achieve a ceasefire, bring all hostages home, and end the war".

He continued, "We reject any notion of equivalence: Hamas is a terrorist organization that committed unspeakable atrocities, continues to hold innocent civilians hostage, and prevents the people of Gaza from living in peace". He called on the five countries to lift the sanctions and stand "shoulder-to-shoulder with Israel", adding, "We remind our partners not to forget who the real enemy is".



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