

UK Starmer government endorses and participates in the US/Israel attack on Iran

Robert Stevens
1 March 2026

Britain's Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer backed the US-Israeli bombardment of Iran in a Downing Street address on Saturday afternoon, providing political cover for a nakedly illegal act of aggression and a regime-change operation.

Starmer sought to obscure Britain's direct military role in the escalating war with weasel words.

Following initial waves of US and Israeli attacks on Iran that morning, Starmer declared that "the United Kingdom played no role in these strikes." But he added, "Our forces are active and British planes are in the sky today as part of coordinated regional defensive operations to protect our people, our interests, and our allies."

UK warplanes taking direct part in the illegal war launched by Trump and Netanyahu include Royal Air Force (RAF) Typhoons operating from Qatar and the Mediterranean island, Cyprus. F-35s fighter jets and air defence systems had already been mobilised to RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus.

On Sunday, Defence Secretary John Healey confirmed on Sky News that UK forces were "taking down the [Iranian] drones [fired in retaliation] that are menacing either our bases, our people or our allies. We've stepped up alongside the Americans. We've stepped up our defensive forces in the Middle East. We're flying those sorties."

Starmer's speech followed a meeting of the government's emergency COBRA committee. This was coordinated with a joint statement issued by the E3 countries—Britain, France and Germany—established in 2003 to handle negotiations regarding Iran's nuclear programme. The E3 underscored their alignment with the bombardment, stating that the three European powers "did not participate in these strikes," but were "in close contact with our international partners, including the United States, Israel, and partners in the region."

Not a single word opposed the US-Israeli assault on Iran. Instead, the E3 portrayed Tehran as the aggressor: "We condemn Iranian attacks on countries in the region in the strongest terms. Iran must refrain from indiscriminate military strikes."

While formally disavowing participation in the initial bombing, Starmer gave a full endorsement of the propaganda rationalising it. "The regime in Iran is utterly abhorrent," he declared, accusing Tehran of destabilising the region. He claimed that "even in the United Kingdom, the Iranian regime poses a direct threat to dissidents and the Jewish community," asserting that over the past year Iran had "backed more than 20 potentially lethal attacks on UK soil."

Not a shred of evidence was presented for these claims, which serve to frame the US-Israeli assault as an act of self-defence against a "terrorist" entity threatening Britain itself. The narrative echoes the propaganda used to justify earlier imperialist wars in the Middle East—from Iraq's non-existent "weapons of mass destruction" to the invocations of humanitarianism in overthrowing governments in Libya and Syria.

Starmer parroted Washington's central pretext for war: "Iran must never be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon. That remains the primary aim of the United Kingdom and our allies—including the US."

He demanded that Tehran "refrain from further strikes, give up its weapons programmes, and cease the appalling violence and repression against the Iranian people—who deserve the right to determine their own future."

As always when voiced from Washington and Downing Street, the phrase "determine their own future" signifies only plans for regime change. This sickening statement was issued after multiple US and Israeli strikes across Iran, including the bombing of a primary school that killed at least 148 people—mostly schoolgirls, whose fate is routinely cited to justify war—injuring 95 more.

The principal demand from opposition leaders was that Starmer abandon even the pretence of restraint. Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch posted on X, "I stand with our allies in the US and Israel as they take on the threat of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its vile regime," urging explicit government backing for the bombardment.

Reform UK leader Nigel Farage demanded, "The Prime

Minister needs to change his mind on the use of our military bases and back the Americans in this vital fight against Iran.”

Summing up the response of the right-wing media, the *Sun on Sunday* complained, “Sir Keir Starmer and other European leaders are at pains to say they played no part in the US and Israeli strikes... But it is naive to think we are not involved in this conflict.” It insisted, “We must support our oldest ally against tyranny. Not only should US attack planes fly from our bases, but Britain must stand ready to help Trump defeat one of our gravest enemies.”

Farage’s remarks reference tensions between Washington and London over the use of British bases, including Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and RAF Fairford in England.

Last year, the Labour government signed an agreement transferring sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius while retaining full operational control of Diego Garcia under a 99-year lease. This was nevertheless heavily criticised in recent days by Trump as the US finalised its assault on Iran.

Britain continued permitting the US to deploy a flood of aircraft and materiel across all other UK-run facilities. Now indications are emerging that London may have permitted the use of Diego Garcia as a staging post for the US assault on Iran.

The *Daily Mail* asked pointedly whether the UK had allowed the use of Diego Garcia, before reporting “Chagossian First Minister” Misley Mandarin as having given his “blessing” for the US to use the base “in defence of peace,” and claiming that his group “govern” and “decide what happens” on the island.

In reality, Diego Garcia has no permanent native population. The 2,000 Chagossians on the island were forcibly expelled by London decades ago, and it now houses only US and British military personnel and contractors. Mandarin reportedly resides on Île du Coin in the Peros Banhos atoll in the archipelago and leads a tiny self-declared “Chagossian Government” composed of as few as six people. Whatever statements he makes, decisions over use of the base rest entirely with London and Washington.

Military figures have pressed for open UK participation in the war without reservations. Cited in the *Mail*, former Royal Navy Commander Tom Sharpe stated: “We absolutely should let the US use UK bases in launching targeted strikes against Iran. It would be madness not to. The Americans can use Diego Garcia anyway, as it is a joint base, but we should be actively supporting.”

The Starmer government is in fact already readied for full participation in the bloody onslaught on Iran as Washington’s junior partner. Asked on Sunday by Sky News whether British military forces would participate

directly in further offensive US strikes Healey refused to rule it out.

When asked six times by the BBC’s Laura Kuenssberg whether the UK backed the strikes or thought they were legal, he replied, “It is for the US to set out the legal basis of the action that it took.” This is equivalent to letting Jack the Ripper determine the legality of stabbing women to death.

Despite years of cuts, the UK retains substantial military assets in the Middle East, including a permanent or semi-permanent military presence in Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Any Iranian strike causing British casualties could be seized upon as a pretext for direct UK bombing operations. It was reported Sunday by Iranian sources that three US and UK oil tankers have been hit by Iranian fire.

Labour’s trajectory was entirely predictable. It was brought to power by the ruling class only because of its stated commitment to war and militarism, and tasked with imposing the austerity measures required to fund it.

As early as October 2, 2024, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned that the Labour government, just three months in office, was integrating Britain ever more closely into US war planning. At that time, RAF warplanes were already operating alongside US forces to shoot down Iranian missiles, with Starmer proclaiming that Britain “stand[s] with Israel and we recognize her right to self-defence.”

The WSWS described his “fairy tale of Iran terrorising the region” as a cover for Britain’s role as Washington’s main military and security partner.

On June 17, 2025, the Socialist Equality Party (UK) warned in its statement, “Oppose Starmer’s plans for war against Iran!” that “advanced preparations” were underway for British intervention in an “unprovoked, illegal imperialist war,” dismissing as a “contemptible fraud” the claims that Starmer sought “restraint, calm and a return to diplomacy.”

On the verge of direct military operations against Iran, Starmer’s government has for more than 18 months been a participant in Israel’s genocide in Gaza, supplying arms and surveillance support while defending Tel Aviv. As the conflict widens, Britain is again embedded militarily, politically and diplomatically in a US-led offensive aimed at recolonising the Middle East, which threatens a wider global conflagration.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact