

British National Security Council leaks reveal secret preparations for assault on Iran

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Leaked accounts of meetings of the National Security Council (NSC) have exposed the British Labour government's detailed advance knowledge of the US-Israeli assault on Iran.

The revelations demolish the lies of Prime Minister Keir Starmer and his ministers that Britain, supposedly committed to diplomacy, was taken by surprise by the US/Israeli bombardment of Iran on February 28.

Published in the conservative magazine *The Spectator* by journalist Tim Shipman, the leaks confirm that British officials had been informed of the planned offensive 17 days in advance and were engaged in intense discussions with Washington over how the Labour government could assist.

Far from opposing the war, Starmer and Defence Secretary John Healey sought ways to support it, while senior British military figures worked directly with US officials to frame requests for British bases in ways that would circumvent legal objections.

According to the leaked account, the US formally contacted British officials on February 11 requesting the use of two key bases—RAF Fairford in England and Diego Garcia in the Chagos Islands—to assist in the planned assault on Iran.

Fairford was critical as the only European military base equipped to support US (B-52s, B-2s) heavy bombers. Diego Garcia has various advantages, including serving as a major port for nuclear submarines and being located 2,400 miles from Iran's southern coastal cities—its relative proximity allowing those to be targeted more easily.

Shipman notes the legal advice provided by the Attorney General Richard Hermer, who warned that the UK could be considered complicit in an illegal war if it facilitated pre-emptive strikes without a direct threat to Britain:

“Hermer's ruling—that international law does not permit pre-emptive strikes unless there is an ‘imminent’ threat to Britain – was already established when the Americans contacted UK officials on 11 February to ask about the use of the bases—17 days before the offensive began, 17 days in which Britain could have done much more to prepare.”

Shipman reports: “It was the view of almost everyone that it was not legal for the UK to be involved in the initial attack because there was no imminent threat to the UK from Iran.”

As part of the broader effort to keep the public in the dark while a war on a sovereign state was being planned—disguised by official negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme—the government delayed publishing the official *summary* of its legal advice until March 1, withholding the full contents from public view.

This leak establishes that the Labour government knew well in advance that the assault being planned by Washington and Tel Aviv was illegal under international law. Yet the government, in order to ally itself with the Trump administration as its self-declared most reliable military security partner, spent the following weeks debating how Britain could eventually participate.

This is more damning still in light of the fact, as confirmed by US and Israeli officials, that the assault was originally scheduled to begin on February 21 but was delayed a week. The reasons included poor weather, operational coordination between US forces and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and the imperative to convince Iranian leaders that no strike was imminent as negotiations were ongoing. It means that Britain's window of prior knowledge was even longer than the 17 days explicitly mentioned in the leaks.

The leaks portray varying positions within the government, with opposition from some ministers to Starmer and Healey's initial plan to back the US-Israeli strikes outright. According to Shipman, at an NSC meeting held on February 27, the day before the bombing of Iran began, “the Prime Minister was not able to carry his own cabinet.”

The NSC is a cabinet committee chaired by the prime minister and normally includes the senior ministers responsible for defence, foreign policy, security and the economy, along with top intelligence and military officials.

Of Starmer's position, Shipman writes that while he “did not want Britain to join the military action, he did think there was a case for allowing Trump to use the bases at Diego Garcia and RAF Fairford to launch the attacks.” This was

opposed by Energy Secretary Ed Miliband, Chancellor Rachel Reeves, Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper and Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood—all from various standpoints as to how quickly and openly they could back a war most of the population opposed.

Starmer factored in that Iran would strike back after being attacked, providing him a pretext to then immediately support the US bombing in its aftermath—as he did on the evening of March 1. Shipman writes that his source characterised Starmer’s position as: “‘Once Iran starts firing missiles at its neighbours, we need to do everything we can to help prevent that.’ Using Diego Garcia ‘allows the US to significantly enhance the rapidity with which they can hit targets’.”

Politically revealing also is the role of Britain’s military leadership in coordinating war planning with their US counterparts. *The Spectator* notes that after the initial disagreements were aired inside the cabinet, military officials began working directly with US counterparts to reshape Washington’s request to use the bases in a form that could be approved by the government to sanction backing a war everyone knew was illegal.

Shipman writes, “On Sunday afternoon [March 1] there was a second NSC meeting in which Britain’s approach changed. The Americans had tabled an ‘official ask’ on Saturday that the two air bases be used only to attack the missile sites, plus ‘the manufacturing of the missiles and the command and control for the missiles’.”

This request was shaped through discussions with UK Chief of the Defence Staff Sir Richard Knighton. Shipman revealed, “That came after... Knighton... spoke to his American counterparts. ‘He’s been working really hard to explain to the US what is legally possible and to help the US shape their request,’ a senior defence source says. [Attorney General] ‘Hermer worked with [Knighton] to determine the art of the possible. And the request became the art of the possible.’ [UK Defence Secretary] Healey also repeatedly spoke to his opposite number, Pete Hegseth.”

In plain English, British government and military personnel at the highest levels were assisting the US administration to reframe its operations to allow the Labour government to claim they were “defensive” rather than offensive.

The Labour government’s attempt to portray its policy as guided by international law has rapidly unravelled. Within days of the war’s outbreak, ministers began signalling that Britain could become directly involved in military operations against Iran.

On Friday, Foreign Secretary David Lammy told BBC Breakfast that British military strikes inside Iran could be lawful if carried out to stop attacks on British personnel or

allies. He declared, “It is entirely legal to protect our people and protect our staff, and therefore all operational capability is available to us in those circumstances.” Pressed on whether this could include striking Iranian bases in anticipation of Iran launching an attack on British targets, he added, “It is my understanding that that would be legal.”

Workers and young people will recall that during Israel’s assault on Gaza, Lammy repeatedly insisted that the IDF was acting within international law—claims widely denounced by legal experts and humanitarian organizations—as Gaza was reduced to rubble with tens of thousands slaughtered.

The Starmer government is also using a single drone strike on the British airbase at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus—that struck a runway on March 2, causing only minor damage and no casualties—to justify a major military build-up in the eastern Mediterranean around Cyprus, where Akrotiri is located.

This is despite the drone fired at Akrotiri not coming from Iran, as confirmed by Britain’s Ministry of Defence, with its origin still not definitively established.

Britain is sending the Type-45 air-defence destroyer HMS *Dragon* along with two Wildcat helicopters armed with Martlet counter-drone missiles under the guise of “protecting” its base. *Dragon* is equipped with the Sea Viper air-defence system and advanced SAMPSON radar capable of detecting aerial threats hundreds of miles away and intercepting multiple missiles or drones simultaneously.

Other NATO powers have also seized on this flimsy pretext as cover to send their own forces: France has dispatched its Languedoc frigate and anti-drone systems; Greece is deploying two frigates and F-16 fighter jets; while Italy, Spain and the Netherlands have announced additional naval deployments to the eastern Mediterranean—all with the justification of defending the base on Cyprus.

On Friday evening, a B-1 Lancer strategic bomber—one of the US Air Force’s three long-range bomber types, capable of carrying up to 24 cruise missiles—landed at RAF Fairford.



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