

UK Labour's crisis deepens as Starmer's lame denial that he endorsed Israeli war crimes flops

Thomas Scripps
24 October 2023

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has been forced to issue lying “clarifications” to his endorsement of Israeli war crimes, responding to a crisis centred on the party’s Muslim representatives and constituency.

On October 11, Starmer told LBC’s Nick Ferrari, “Israel does have that right, must have that right, to defend herself, and Hamas bears responsibility.” Ferrari asked, “A siege is appropriate? Cutting off power, cutting off water, Sir Keir?”, to which the Labour leader responded, “I think Israel does have that right...”

The comments triggered an explosion of outrage, with several councillors in heavily Muslim areas deciding it was no longer tenable to continue their careers in the Labour Party. Up to now, 23 have resigned and are serving as independents.

Several joined over 8,000 Muslims—including imams, doctors and other professionals—in signing an open letter to Starmer declaring, “Your consistent defence of Israel’s actions, often with limited regard for the humanitarian plight of the Palestinians, has left many members of the Muslim community feeling unheard and unrepresented... If these concerns are not adequately addressed, your position as the Leader of the Labour Party will become untenable for the Muslim community.”

This is a tame version of the sentiment among Muslims in the UK, 86 percent of whom have voted for Labour in the last general election, 2019, and who make up a majority of 14 constituencies and large proportions of many more.

Amid this escalating crisis, on October 14, three days after his LBC interview, Starmer published a personal statement including the line, “We call on all parties to act in line with international law, including allowing humanitarian access of food, water, electricity and medicines to Gaza and ensuring safe humanitarian

corridors in Gaza for those fleeing violence.”

He did not mention that the author of the “violence” and blockade of humanitarian support was Israel. The majority of the statement was dedicated to reaffirming “Israel has the right, indeed the duty, to defend herself ... Responsibility for what has happened sits with the terrorists of Hamas...”

Declaring support for “humanitarian access” is, of course, not the same as demanding the siege and collective punishment of Gaza is ended, let alone the bombing of civilians; in practice it has amounted to touting the delivery of a few dozen lorries’ worth of food and water—a miniscule fraction of the population’s needs—to justify support for an ongoing campaign of mass murder and ethnic cleansing.

On October 17, 40 legal academics sent another open letter to Starmer, his Shadow Attorney General Emily Thornberry and Shadow Foreign Secretary David Lammy noting that Starmer’s statement “did nothing to rescind your tacit approval of Israel’s collective punishment of the population of Gaza.” The letter adds that on October 15, Lammy was reminded of the illegality of forcible population transfers and asked whether he nonetheless supported Israel’s actions, responding “It’s not a yes or a no. This is a war situation.”

The signatories requested that the party “immediately issue a public and detailed clarification of Labour’s legal position on collective punishment and on the forcible transfer of civilians. We request that you confirm that you and your party oppose the commission of war crimes, wherever and whenever they may occur.”

Even Conservative peer Sayeeda Warsi has accused Labour of applying a “harsher standard” to Muslims, treating them as if they “don’t matter” and “failing to respond to anti-Muslim racism being experienced by its

members.”

On Wednesday last week, in another poorly received attempt to soothe tensions, Starmer sent a letter to Labour councillors saying, “this is a terrifying and distressing time for everyone—Israeli, Palestinian, Muslim and Jew.” He told Parliament during Prime Minister’s Question time that “food, fuel and water must get into Gaza immediately,” while continuing to support Israel’s bombing campaign and holding Hamas responsible for every death and maiming.

His spokesperson claimed that in the interview with Ferrari, “If you listen to the tape it was one of those things where there was overlapping questions and answers based on what had been said before, which was the specific question beforehand about Israel having the right to defend itself.”

This line was repeated by Shadow International Development Minister Lisa Nandy on Sunday, who told the BBC she understood why “people in the Muslim community... heard those words and felt very concerned, and I’m glad that we’ve clarified that,” adding, “We can’t apologise for holding a position that we’ve never held” and repeatedly refusing to comment on whether the Israeli siege constitutes a war crime.

On Monday, Starmer posted on X/Twitter that he told a meeting at an Islamic centre in Wales “it is not and has never been my view that Israel had the right to cut off water, food, fuel or medicines. International law must be followed.”

No one believes this stomach-turning attempt to save face. Starmer, a former Doughty Street lawyer, is covering himself against both political fallout and possible future prosecution, having gone even further than Tory leader Rishi Sunak in cheering Israel’s genocide against Gaza. The International Centre of Justice for Palestinians has already raised the possibility of pursuing charges. But his attempt to perfume the stench pouring off Labour will do nothing to convince millions of disgusted workers and youth, not only Muslims, to vote for the party at the next election.

The Labour leader is joined in his damage limitation exercise by the official gatekeepers of “left” and “Muslim” opinion in the party. The Labour Muslim Network told the *Guardian* this week, “There’s been a huge amount of damage done to relations over this, but there is still a chance to rebuild trust and reassure communities that Labour is still a safe place for us.”

Labour has never been and can never be a “safe space” for solidarity with the Palestinians. This is underscored by

the fact that Starmer’s defender Lisa Nandy was made chair of the Labour Friends of Palestine group in 2018.

But the prize for political cynicism goes, once again, to the Labour “left”. With hundreds of thousands on the streets every week demanding action to oppose Israel’s war, chair of the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) of Labour MPs Richard Burgon has tabled an ineffectual early day motion endorsing various aid agencies’ calls for “an immediate de-escalation and cessation of hostilities”.

The wording, which only goes as far as expressing “deep alarm at the Israeli military bombardment and total siege of Gaza”, is so weak it can be supported by Tory MPs Sir Peter Bottomley and Crispin Blunt, along with 24 members of the Scottish National Party, three from Plaid Cymru, two from Alba and one from the Green Party. Yet just 37 of Labour’s 199 MPs have signed.

Among them are former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, his shadow home secretary Diane Abbott—both suspended from the Parliamentary Labour Party—and former chancellor John McDonnell, who have jumped at the opportunity to make a show of opposition without directly challenging Israel’s key enablers in the UK—Sunak and Starmer.

Whether nominally “left” or “right”, the entire Labour Party is being discredited beyond repair in the eyes of millions. It is a war crime, genocide-supporting party which the SCG have spent the years since Starmer’s takeover desperately trying to remain members of. The consequences of their capitulation before the Blairite “left antisemitism” witch-hunt are now clear for all to see.



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