

UK Labour government maintains its genocide denial in Gaza

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The Starmer Labour government has spent the last weeks deepening its complicity in Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza, earning direct criticism from Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories . She urged during her speaking tour of the UK last week that people act to make sure their “elected leaders do not drag this country and its taxpayers into funding a war of annihilation.”

Albanese’s comments were immediately prompted by the repulsive performance of Labour Foreign Secretary David Lammy in parliament at the end of October. Given the opportunity by Conservative MP Nick Timothy to confirm “there is not a genocide occurring in the Middle East”, Lammy seized it with both hands.

“I do agree with the honourable gentleman,” said Lammy, “Those terms were largely used when millions of people lost their lives in crises like Rwanda, the second world war, the Holocaust, and the way that they are used now undermines the seriousness of that term.”

This single sentence tears international human rights law to shreds. That it was uttered by a lawyer says everything about the real meaning of the “law” and “human rights” as observed by imperialist politicians. It also damns Lammy as a man who is fully aware of the crimes he whitewashes. His logic, of course, would mean that Israel is free to carry on to the 999,999th murdered Palestinian—forcibly expelling countless millions besides—until the Genocide Convention has anything to say about it.

Albanese commented in an interview, “David Lammy has to explain to the public where he read that it’s the number of people killed which defines genocide. David Lammy should read Article 2.4 of the Genocide Convention which refers to an act of genocide that

doesn’t involve the killing even of one person. There is genocide through forceful transfer of children...

“David Lammy is not the only genocide denier. But I think it’s particularly serious when it comes from someone who has a position of authority, who carries an even greater authority because he’s a man of law.

“But excuse me. What constitutes genocide is established by Article 2 of the Genocide Convention, not personal opinions. And it’s the intent, the determination to destroy a group in all or in part through several, or even only one, of these acts: killing, infliction of severe bodily or mental harm, and creation of conditions of life which would bring about the destruction the group. And look at Gaza today.”

The UN rapporteur has produced two detailed reports substantiating the case against Israel: “Anatomy of a Genocide” in March and “Genocide as Colonial Erasure” in October. The latter notes in its conclusion, “Since its establishment, Israel has treated the occupied people as a hated encumbrance and threat to be eradicated, subjecting millions of Palestinians, for generations, to everyday indignities, mass killing, mass incarceration, forced displacement, racial segregation and apartheid.” This, Albanese argues, is “a stain on the international system and humanity, which must be ended, investigated and prosecuted.”

Lammy’s office replied lamely to a request for comment from *Middle East Eye* that he did not “specify that genocide required ‘millions of people to be killed’.” He had, “simply observed that the term has ‘largely’ applied to such cases.”

Albanese was unimpressed, telling *Tribune*, “History will judge these people who have not done anything in their power to prevent atrocities. Meanwhile, in doing so, the UK is violating its obligations under international law not to aid and assist a state which is

committing international wrongdoings. This is where we are. There are responsibilities; there might be complicity.”

That complicity includes the hundreds of UK arms contracts supplying Israel with the instruments of its crimes, including parts for the F-35 jets which have helped to turn Gaza into a wasteland. It includes hundreds of surveillance flights over the territory flown from the British airbase in Cyprus, the transport of US special forces from that airbase to Israel, and the deployment of UK spies to the country—all reported by *Declassified UK*. And it includes the military planes and ships deployed against the Houthis and Iran, giving the fascist Israeli government the security to carry on its genocidal offensive.

In the context of these accusations by a UN official, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer doubled down in parliament last Wednesday. Asked to share his definition of genocide by Independent MP Ayoub Khan, the prime minister replied, “It would be wise to start a question like that by reference to what happened in October of last year. I’m well aware of the definition of genocide, and that is why I’ve never described this as and referred to it as genocide.”

This is the response of a political criminal, right down to the mafia-like threat in the first sentence: you’ll make the ritual condemnation of Hamas if you know what’s good for you!

As for the refusal to acknowledge the genocide, Starmer is not only wrong but lying through his teeth. He *knows* Israel is committing this heinous crime to the very letter of the law, and he does not need the UN special rapporteur to tell him so because he studied and worked with that law in his career as a barrister—his previously much spoken of past as a “human rights lawyer”. Though as Albanese commented in her *Tribune* interview, “I don’t think that one can call himself or herself a human rights lawyer if they don’t stand for human rights”.

Starmer and Lammy are aiming both to facilitate the ongoing annihilation of the Palestinians in Gaza—by contributing to Israel’s campaign of denial—and to cover their government’s legal exposure for complicity in breaches of the Genocide Convention. Should that case ever be levelled against them, the Labour cabinet will claim in the tradition of many of history’s worst criminals that they simply did not realise what was

going on.

Unfortunately for Starmer, he has used the term genocide multiple times in the past when it suited the agenda of British imperialism.

In 2016, he voted to refer to the UN the Islamic State’s massacres of Yazidis and Christians—involving the deaths of roughly 5,000 people—as a case of genocide. In 2021, he denounced inaction over China’s treatment of the Uyghurs as turning a “blind eye to genocide”. In 2022, he referred to the genocide at Srebrenica, remembering “the 8,000 Muslim men and boys who lost their lives”. He had previously claimed the Serbians had committed genocide against the Croats, who lost roughly 15,000 citizens.

Lammy, for his part, warned in 2017 that the Rohingya were “facing genocide... ethnic cleansing, gross human rights abuse and a UK government too afraid to stand up and speak out,” in 2017.

None of which is to say that either of them cared any more about these victims than they do about the Palestinians, but to make the point that, for the ruling class, genocide is not a universal crime: it is either an accusation to be thrown at enemies or a policy tool to be used by allies. Such rank hypocrisy has always existed, but it has been brought to extremes by the Gaza genocide, with British imperialism now openly opposing UN experts and denying international law.

As with the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, the UK’s Labour government is driven to the most extreme positions by its desperate reliance on a military and diplomatic partnership with America—after Brexit, and now faced with the prospect of Trump’s tariff war suffered without the backing of the European Union. But it is part of a broader trend. The new imperialist war for the redivision of the world is tearing apart whole regions of the world, and the capitalist pretence of the “rules based international order” and “international law” along with them.



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