

As Israel Smashes Up Jenin, Its British Apologists Are Enabling This Violence

Every word that Keir Starmer or Lisa Nandy utter in support of the 'Jewish homeland' sends a very clear message to Israel that it can carry on doing what it wants

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Global Research, July 06, 2023

[Middle East Eye](#) 5 July 2023

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

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Consider two quotes which are almost contemporaneous. The first is from [Ameed Shahada](#), a Palestinian journalist who was in [Jenin camp](#) during the [Israeli](#) forces' large-scale [assault](#) this week.

"The scenes in Jenin have been terrifying. There is live fire [from] every direction, and homes are being demolished. The sound of screams are hard to forget. They keep being replayed in my head. The biggest shock was when the Israeli forces came out of the jeeps and started firing bullets at us and our cameras when they saw us."

The second quote came from [Michael Gove](#), Tory politician and secretary of state for levelling up, housing and communities. As Israeli bulldozers were [carving](#) their way through Jenin camp on Tuesday, [Gove](#) got up in the [UK](#) Parliament to move [the second reading](#) of a bill that would outlaw the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS).

He ended his opening speech by [saying](#) that anyone who voted against the bill was "antisemitic": "The question for every member of this House is whether they stand with us against antisemitism or not."

The Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) [Bill](#) seeks to ban public bodies including local councils from supporting boycotts targeting foreign governments based on moral or political grounds.

Gove launched his attack on the BDS movement on two counts - that it fostered antisemitism at home and that it contravened British policy on the conflict, which advocates for a two-state solution, because, he [claimed](#), BDS was specifically "designed to

erase Israel's identity as a home for the Jewish people".

In the words of [Richard Burden](#), former shadow minister, the bill uniquely shields human rights abuses by Israel from scrutiny by UK public bodies and would drive a coach and horses through Britain's compliance with the [UN's Guiding Principles](#) on Business and Human Rights, to which the UK signed up over a decade ago.

The timing of this bill and this debate is not accidental.

It's not a fluke of history that both sides of the House of Commons should be debating a law that would add yet another layer of impunity on Israel at a time when it is waging a murderous act of war against refugees in a very crowded camp. And when this war is over, its army [concentrates its fire on the hospitals](#) treating the wounded.

Israel's playbook

The British debate is absolutely part of Israel's playbook. It's an essential part of the cover Israel uses to carry on with its [project of annexation](#).

At the very moment when Israel is clearly – and indubitably – the aggressor, both sides in the debate in London seek to paint it and its supporters as victims.

It involves a fiction: that any British government of any political colour is remotely serious about enforcing the creation of a Palestinian state, which today would entail the expulsion of anywhere up to [700,000 settlers](#) from the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

It also erects a conveniently high screen of deception.

In this case from Israelis like settler Mordechai Cohen, who told the Israeli channel Kan that the aim of the unprecedented level of settler attacks on Palestinian villages and towns in the West Bank was to "push them to leave". He added: "Palestinians should go to Jordan to live there if they are interested in a normal life."

Cohen cheered the sight of [3,000 Palestinians fleeing](#) their homes in the camp which was under aerial and ground assault from the Israeli army.

These Palestinians have had to flee their homes many times in the last [75 years](#). Their families are from Haifa, Yaffa and all parts of the territory occupied in 1948.

The obscenity of such a debate taking place in the House of Commons on the very night on which Israeli forces attacked a refugee camp with 15,000 people crammed into half a square mile, with drones, tanks, bulldozers and snipers, is plain for all to see.

The [Labour Party](#) under Keir Starmer is rapidly divesting itself of any resemblance to the party that campaigned against South African apartheid. Or any claim to be progressive.

The difference between Starmer and Gove is over phrasing, not intent.

Green light to extremism

For the second time in his career as leader of the opposition, Starmer turned to a KC for

advice.

The first was [Martin Forde](#) QC who found that it was “entirely misleading” to assert that the former Labour leader [Jeremy Corbyn](#) had actively intervened to stop antisemitism cases from being investigated.

This was not what Starmer, himself a human rights lawyer, wanted to hear. So he [ignored](#) Forde and binned his advice. Starmer fared little better with the second KC he turned to in Richard Hermer.

Hermer [found](#) the anti-BDS bill objectionable, irrespective of whether one considers the BDS movement to be thoroughly reprehensible or conversely a legitimate form of non-violent protest.

Hermer found the bill likely to have a detrimental impact on the UK’s ability to protect and promote human rights overseas, to be inconsistent with “our obligations under international law, and will stifle free speech at home”.

“Had legislation of this nature been in effect in the 1980s it would have rendered it unlawful to refuse to source goods from apartheid South Africa,” Hermer concluded.

Starmer ignored Hermer, and Labour [abstained](#) in voting on the second reading.

Such an outcome is manna from heaven for the Israeli soldiers and settlers attacking Palestinian refugees in their camps, villagers and in their homes.

So, too, is the mildly worded statement from Prime Minister Rishi Sunak who urged Israel, which has so far [killed 12 Palestinians](#) and wounded more than 100 others, to [“show restraint”](#).

Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) called the US Israel’s “irreplaceable and indispensable ally”.

The US backed Israel’s justification for the attack on Jenin refugee camp. State Department spokesman Ned Price said:

“Israel has the legitimate right to defend its people and its territory against all forms of aggression, including those from terrorist groups.”

Cumulatively, these statements are the brightest of green lights to the most extreme government in Israel’s history, which numbers fascists and terrorists as ministers, to carry on with their ethnic cleansing of the West Bank.

Impunity is an intrinsic part of allowing Israel to flout the declared policy of its two principal backers, the UK and the US.

And it is the reason why Israel has long passed the point of accepting a Palestinian state as its neighbour. It is now a one-state solution, with a Jewish minority trying with all the means at its disposal to force the Arab majority to leave.

Pretending that a Palestinian state is still possible is one of the ugliest and most cynical fictions perpetrated by the British government.

A one-state reality

[Itamar Ben Gvir](#), Israel's minister for national security, and the settlers make no bones about it.

Israel's settler leaders see no problem in declaring their intentions. In fact they take pride in it. They want to force as many Palestinians to leave their homes in the West Bank as they can get away with, by terrorising them, burning them out of their homes and shooting them.

The settlers are protected by the soldiers who are conducting the same policy in Jenin, Nablus and throughout the West Bank.

[Bezalel Smotrich](#), leader of the Religious Zionism Party, is equally clear about his intentions for the West Bank. In the "Decision Plan", he [wrote](#) in 2017 that the Palestinians [do not exist](#) as a people.

"Basically, the 'Palestinian people' is nothing but a counter-movement to the Zionist movement, this is its essence and its right to exist. The Palestinian self-determination parties also know that such a 'nation' did not exist before the Zionist enterprise, and that 'Palestine' was the geographical name of this piece of land and nothing else."

This is the way Russian President Vladimir Putin talks about [Ukraine](#) and Ukrainians.

Smotrich concludes:

"The continued existence of the two conflicting national aspirations in our small piece of land will guarantee us many more years of blood and life on the sword. Only when one of the parties gives up, willingly or by necessity, the realization of his national ambition in the Land of Israel, will the longed-for peace come, and it will be possible to live a life of civil coexistence here."

It is another fiction to pretend that this, too, is not the policy of Israel, its settler movement, its army, and its courts.

Another generation

Every word that Starmer or Lisa Nandy, shadow secretary of state for levelling up, utter in the support of the "Jewish homeland", every time Labour abstains in such a vote, they send a very clear message to Israel that it can carry on doing what it wants.

It spurs every part and expression of "the Jewish state", which defines itself as the expression of self-determination for its Jewish citizens only, to finish the job it started in 1948 by mass expulsions of the Palestinians.

Israel does not see the suffering it causes, nor the humanity of its victims. It merely sees them as an obstacle to its national ambitions.

I don't know who is more to blame – Smotrich, Ben-Gvir or Israel's apologists in Britain.

At this point in history, they serve the same cause. At least Smotrich is open about his motives. Starmer is not.

This is not the first time parts of Jenin camp have been flattened by bulldozers.

Ariel Sharon thought he had dealt with the problem after [the Battle of Jenin](#) at the height of the Second Intifada in 2002, in which 52 Palestinians were killed, around half of whom were civilians.

Tony Blair, then Middle East envoy, also thought he had cleared up the problem with his plans for an economic zone.

And yet exactly 21 years later, Jenin is [a hotbed of resistance](#) with a generation of fighters who were not born in 2002. Jenin will not just lie down and take being occupied. It did not do so against British occupation. It will not against Israeli occupation.

If Netanyahu thinks a book has been closed by this operation, he is profoundly mistaken.

Another chapter has been started which will spur another generation of fighters to take up the cause of liberation of their homeland.

From all occupiers.

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Featured image: An elderly woman reacts as she stands by the rubble of broken pavement along an alley in Jenin in the occupied West Bank on 5 July 2023 (AFP)

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