

Jeremy Corbyn: Israel-Palestine War. “I condemn violence against all civilians, why can’t Keir Starmer?”

Jeremy Corbyn calls for an immediate ceasefire in the Middle East before Gaza is turned to rubble.

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“More bitterness. More hatred. More problems come down the road.”

In July 2023, I spoke in Parliament after the Israeli Defence Force conducted their largest military operation on the West Bank since 2002. Their target was Jenin refugee camp, home to more than 14,000 people, living in less than half a square kilometre in size. In a space this densely populated, there is no such thing as targeted strikes. 12 Palestinians were killed, including 5 children, and more than 100 were injured. I pleaded with MPs on both sides of the House to consider not just the immediate human cost of this attack, but the chain reaction of misery and terror that it would unleash.

On Saturday, hundreds of innocent people in southern Israel were brutally murdered in a horrifying attack by Hamas. Dozens were taken hostage. Today, and for the rest of their lives, families across Israel will be mourning their loved ones, who were gunned down in a heinous massacre. The fear they must have felt is unthinkable. So too, is the pain and trauma that has been left behind.

In response, the Israeli government have obliterated entire neighbourhoods in Gaza. They have cut off the supply of food, water, electricity in gas. They have targeted hospitals, destroyed ambulances and damaged nurseries. And they have bombed the Rafah crossing, destroying the only means of escape. Trapped in an open-air prison, the Palestinian people have nowhere to go, nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

The horror of all loss of life, young people in Negev and now the bombing of Gaza must be in the forefront of our minds. I utterly condemn the attacks on civilians, Israeli and Palestinian.

And I plead with politicians across the globe to do all they can to stop any further loss of human life. Our political leaders surely must understand that, without a serious political intervention, one tragedy will follow another, and a cycle of despair will go on and on. In the immediate aftermath of horror, we need voices for peace and de-escalation. Instead, inconceivably, both major political parties continue to give the green light to an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe.

Both the Foreign Secretary and Shadow Foreign Secretary have reiterated their support for Israel's "right to defend itself", yet consistently fail to offer sufficient specificity about what this means, let alone how it should be exercised within the boundaries of international law. Although, yesterday, the leader of the Labour Party offered some clarity.

In an interview with LBC, Keir Starmer was asked whether "cutting off power and water" to 2 million people, half of whom are children, was appropriate. He agreed that Israel "has that right". Where is the empathy for Palestinians who have lost their loved ones, their homes and their futures? What happened to the universal application of international law?

We may be witnessing the beginning of the total annihilation of Gaza and its people. This is not a battle between one state and another. It is couched as an Israeli response to a non-state actor, but in fact it is a response to Palestinian people wherever they are. What is unfolding is not a conflict of equals, but the systematic starvation, subjugation and destruction of an unarmed civilian population.

I wonder, if Gaza is wiped off the face of the earth, whether our politicians will look back and reflect on the reality of their unwavering support. If they had any integrity, they would mourn the innocent Palestinian lives that have been erased in the name of self-defence. They should be ashamed of their cowardice, knowing that others will pay the price for the war crimes they refuse to oppose.

We should condemn the targeting of all civilian life, no matter who does it. That this is apparently controversial is testament to the depravity of a media and political class that shuts down, distorts and denounces calls for peace. The heinous attacks on civilians in Israel by Hamas were utterly deplorable.

This cannot justify the indiscriminate killing of Palestinians, who are paying a price for a crime they did not commit. All human life is equal. Why is it so difficult for our politicians to be consistent in this basic moral principle?

This is the question that many people in this country are asking when they express solidarity with the Palestinian people. They are not expressing support for Hamas. To deliberately conflate the two is a disgusting, cynical and chilling attempt to further erode our democratic rights, and wilfully ignores a very basic demand: to stop the killing of innocent people.

The global community has a responsibility to de-escalate this catastrophic situation. That means calling for an immediate ceasefire. That means the release of Israeli hostages. That means ending the siege of Gaza. And that means recognising the underlying roots of this tragic cycle of violence: the enduring occupation of the Palestinian people.

As well as the occupation of Gaza, there are more than 140 official settlements in the West Bank, a reality that Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, B'Tselem and the UN have said

constitutes a system of apartheid. The only path to a just and lasting peace is an end to the occupation. Until this is achieved, we will continue to mourn the tragic loss of life, Israeli and Palestinian.

“Gaza has casualties...mothers who cry... let’s use this emotion, we are two nations from one father, let’s make peace, a real peace.”

Those were the words of an Israeli father whose daughter had been so cruelly taken hostage by Hamas. I cannot fathom the agony he must be feeling. Yet in the depths of unimaginable darkness, he found the courage to call for peace. Why can’t we?

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