

## Why I oppose Labour's position on Gaza

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*I was sent a note by an academic this afternoon, who was surprised by my certainty that Labour was wrong in taking the position that it has on Gaza.*

*That person said the mail he sent to me was private. I will not disclose it or his identity, but I took time out from what I was meant to be doing this afternoon to reply as follows:*

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Thank you for your note. I understand it is private. I may well publish this response, but in a way that will never identify you.

I note that your core argument is as follows:

- \* Labour will tear itself apart over Gaza.
- \* There is no real chance of a ceasefire because of the current positions of both Israel and Hamas, so what is the point of this?
- \* Demanding a ceasefire will not deliver it, and therefore there is no political gain from doing so. More importantly, and you clearly say this, nor will it in your opinion, save any lives.
- \* On the other hand, a humanitarian pause will let some immediate aid get into Gaza. It is, therefore, you think, a better option.

I note your comment that you have been looking at this situation for at least 30 years. I guess it is fair to say in response, that I too have been doing so, for at least that long. Any politically aware person in their 60s has been unable to avoid this issue for most of their life, any more than they could have, for example, avoided noting conflicts in Ireland, and their current resolution, from which I draw hope.

These points being made to protect your anonymity, the actual question that you asked me was how I could be so certain about the need for a ceasefire?

The first, and most obvious comment to make in response is that words matter. A ceasefire assumes there will be no resumption of hostilities, however difficult that might be to imagine. A humanitarian pause necessarily presume the resumption of conflict. The two are, therefore, fundamentally different, and I cannot see how anyone might confuse the two.

In that case, in my opinion Labour is not calling for a cessation of hostilities in Gaza. It is instead, as you imply, simply requesting pauses in those hostilities, so that some aid might be provided to a civilian population who have no means of escape from the situation in which they find themselves, which includes an occupation by a force from another country contrary to international law. As the United Nations is now making clear, Israel has a right to self-defence only so long as it is not an occupying force. When it becomes so, and it has clearly stated that this is its intent, the legitimacy of its war is then at an end. Labour's tacit acceptance that it may continue its hostilities is, then, an acceptance of a war crime that is taking place right now, in real-time. This shows not only a lack of the understanding required to form a government, but also of any of the political ability necessary to do so given that the message that Labour is sending is quite extraordinarily diplomatically inept.

My second reason for thinking that Labour has this wrong is as emphatic. We do not need humanitarian pauses so that people might receive medical and other aid at this time. Instead, given the very particular nature of this conflict, what we need is a ceasefire so that people who are, in many cases, already refugees should not be forced into an ever-diminishing territory from which they have no chance of escape before what would seem to be their near certain deaths. A ceasefire might provide the mechanism to resolve how this humanitarian crisis, which has been created by Israel however hideous and unacceptable the actions of Hamas were, on which actions I am unwavering in my opinion and condemnation.

Third, your suggestion that anything that might be said will have no impact on outcomes is one that I find exceptionally difficult to understand. There is a legal obligation under international law for the UK to uphold the 1951 Geneva convention on the rules of law, which the current actions of Israel clearly contravene in the eyes of the UN. This means that as far as I am concerned any political party in the UK has a legal obligation to support a ceasefire. How can you ignore that?

In addition, your suggestion also seems to imply that there is no power to opinion, that persuasion is not possible, and that there is no route to resolution by the use of diplomatic pressure in a conflict of this sort. I simply cannot accept any of those arguments. Every one of them appears to me to be the abandonment of hope at best, and responsibility at worst.

Then just let me consider your suggestion that none of this matters because anything that might be said will not make a difference. That is utterly untrue. It matters here, in the UK, to people like me. And there are millions who feel as I do. And we matter.

However, much more than that, if Labour really thought that what it was saying did not matter then what it should be doing is standing up on a point of principle, which must be that a ceasefire is the only way forward so that this illegal invasion with the intention to occupy by Israel should end. This is the only ethical position that they could take.

Is it on the basis of ethics that some nations in the world have a proud tradition of not being neutral, but of being peacemakers. In a world where the UK clearly has no military significance anymore, Labour could have taken this opportunity to reposition the whole profile of the UK on this issue within the UN and within the international military hierarchy so that it could also take on this role, marking a serious change in policy as a consequence that could have had an extraordinary impact, including on our standing in the world. Instead, Labour has chosen the lowest common denominator position.

Unsurprisingly, I treat Labour's decision with the contempt it deserves.

Unsurprisingly, I think that a lot of Labour MPs will do the same this evening.

Unsurprisingly then, Labour might tear itself apart at this.

Equally unsurprisingly, Labour might tonight deny itself the opportunity for office at the very time when a clearly principled government is required in this country after decades of devastation by politicians whose only motivation has been self-interested posturing, at best. If they do bring that outcome on themselves, they deserve it.

So why am I so certain of where I stand, which was your question? Because I happen to think that there is a difference between right and wrong.

I think that what Israel is doing is wrong, as clearly as I think what Hamas did was wrong, and as clearly as I think that what Labour is doing now is also completely wrong. And, I might add, as clearly as I think that only a ceasefire can provide the starting point for these wrongs to be addressed.

What do you propose?

Best regards,

Richard