

What will Starmer do about Netanyahu?

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This decision of the international criminal court to issue arrest warrants on Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant is, in my opinion, welcome.

The fact that the Court is quite explicit about the fact that they think these two have committed war crimes against the civilian population of Gaza is also welcome. For those of us who have argued that such crimes have been committed throughout the current Israeli government campaign in Gaza, this provides not just exoneration for our opinion, for which many of us have received abuse, but also the clearest indication that international opinion is moving in our direction.

By taking this action, the Court is also making it quite clear that the actions of this Israeli government can be viewed as being distinct from those of Israel as a Jewish state. The suggestions made by far too many people that criticisms of Netanyahu's actions are antisemitic should now cease. They are not. They have nothing to do with his being Jewish or Israel being a majority Jewish state. They have everything to do with his abuse of the people of Gaza, which is contrary to international law.

I should also add that the issue of a warrant against Hamas military leader Mohammed Deif was also welcome, but also largely symbolic now as it is widely assumed that Israel has already killed him.

All this being said, what is now required is a reaction from the UK government. The UK is a participant in the International Criminal Court, like a majority of the world's governments and a majority of the members of the United Nations, with Russia, Israel and the USA being notable exceptions. As a result, and because we are bound by the Court's decisions, if Netanyahu were to come to the UK, he should be arrested so that he might stand trial on the charges now laid against him. This would be the case even if he were on a plane that only touched down here whilst on its way to another destination, such as the USA.

So, what will the arch-Zionist Keir Starmer, do as a consequence? The statement issued by the UK government yesterday was less than forthcoming, saying:

We respect the independence of the International Criminal Court (ICC) which is the primary international institution for investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes of international concern.

This government has been clear that Israel has a right to defend itself, in accordance with international law.

There is no moral equivalence between Israel, a democracy, and Hamas and Lebanese Hizballah, which are terrorist organisations.

We remain focused on pushing for an immediate ceasefire, to bring an end to the devastating violence in Gaza. "This is essential to protect civilians, ensure the release of hostages and to increase humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Make of that what you will. I call them weasel words.

The likelihood is that Starmer will, as is so typical of a politician of his type, suggest he cannot consider what he would describe as a hypothetical question as to the actions he would take if Netanyahu were to come to the UK. That, however, is absurd. If he wishes to uphold the rule of international law and remain within the rules-based system of international governance that this country helped create, he has no choice but to answer any such question that might be put to him.

As a lawyer, he must know that just as much as he must know that most of what lawyers do involves considering what he would describe as a 'hypothetical' question. He should, therefore, make it absolutely clear that the UK will act in accordance with the International Criminal Court's requirements and arrest Netanyahu if he comes to this country.

If he does not, we have to presume three things.

The first is that he supports the genocide in Israel.

The second is that he has abandoned all those commitments to human rights that he likes to claim were the foundation of his career.

Thirdly, he will be indicating that he is willing to put the UK outside the system of international law to support a country, the leader of a country which is committing genocide in that country's name.

He has to decide. Either he supports tyranny, or he doesn't. There is no point in between, and in this case, the evidence against Netanyahu is overwhelming. His actions have deliberately set out to harm the civilian population of Gaza. There can be no defence for what Netanyahu has done, and there can be no defence for those who are unwilling to take steps to end the genocide that he has put in place.

Starmer must make clear what he will do, or he faces the risk of being complicit in Netanyahu's war crimes. Even he should understand that.