

DAVID LAMMY, MP

SUNDAY WITH LAURA KUENSSBERG, 15TH OCTOBER 2023

DAVID LAMMY, MP
Shadow Foreign Secretary

VD: The Shadow Foreign Secretary is here this morning. Good morning to you.

DL: Good morning.

VD: Labour leadership has said Israel has a right to defend itself, Hamas bears responsibility for their terrorist acts. I want to ask you if you support the order from the Israeli government to those people in northern Gaza to get out and go south.

DL: This story begins last Saturday. I'm thinking of Celine Ben Nagar, a young woman finishing maternity leave, should be starting work today, and she's been taken hostage and her baby and her husband are still in Israel and the 1,300 people that have been murdered by a prescribed terrorist organisation. So of course Israel has the right to deal with that terrorism, to go and get those hostages, and to degrade the rockets and military equipment that's being used against them. However—

VD: So you support the order?

DL: However, it is hugely important that that is within international law. Victoria—

VD: I've already just given some quotes to the Foreign Secretary which suggest the order to move people is against international law, because it's the forcible transfer of a population.

DL: There are two things that arise from the Second World War. The first is the birth of Israel and the home for the Jewish people,

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and that is why it is hugely important that we support Israel's right to defend itself. The second thing is the rules based order that we all live by. It's why we stand up to Putin and autocrats and dictators across the world. And it's hugely important that that law that arises from the experience of the Second World War and The Holocaust is upheld.

VD: So—

DL: That is why civilian casualties must be minimised in any war context—

VD: Do you support the order to move people from north to south?

DL: And people should have access to food, to medicine, and to utility and safe passage so they can move across the country.

VD: Okay, do you support the order to move them or not?

DL: The order to move them? Well, clearly—

VD: Just yes or no.

DL: It's not a yes or no, Victoria. I'm hoping one day to be Foreign Secretary and a chief diplomat, so it's not a yes or no.

VD: Why not? Why not?

DL: Let me – can I answer the question?

VD: Please.

DL: Very simply. This is a war situation. War is ugly, very, very sadly people die. We have rules and those rules mean that you must minimise death. Now you know and I know because

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Netanyahu has said that there will be an invasion shortly, against that backdrop, of course it's right that civilians must not be in harm's way. An order has been issued, I'm glad that that order's been extended, of course I am, but the – the point I want to get across is that it's hugely important that we minimise the loss of human life and anyone seeing those scenes from Gaza—

VD: Right, well, let's talk about international humanitarian law.

DL: It's horrendous for those people that are facing that at this point in time.

VD: The UN Human Rights Commissioner says the imposition of sieges that endanger the lives of civilians is prohibited under international humanitarian law. Keir Starmer, your leader, a human rights lawyer, says Israel does have the right to impose a siege. Who is right?

DL: In situations of war where there are allegations of war crimes that must ultimately be a matter for the UN and its agencies...

VD: No.

DL: ...and for the ICC. I'm sorry, Victoria, that is the case. This is not a moment for me to pass...

VD: We're not suggesting—

DL: ...judgement about whether—

VD: We're not suggesting they're war crimes.

DL: I'm not here as a lawyer, I'm here as Shadow Foreign Secretary.

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VD: And neither's the UN Human Rights Commissioner. He was saying it's breaking international law to impose a siege—

DL: And he's entitled to his view.

VD: It's not a view.

DL: He's entitled to his view.

VD: He's not just plucked an opinion out of the air, he's looking at the framework, the Geneva Conventions, he says, the imposition of sieges which endangers the lives of civilians is prohibited under international humanitarian law. Keir Starmer says Israel has a right to impose a siege.

DL: I don't—

VD: Who is right?

DL: Keir Starmer has said right from the beginning that any war, it's important that democracies uphold the rules based order and that that must be within international law. He's said that from the beginning.

VD: And I'm simply asking you – yeah, yeah.

DL: His statement today—

VD: And I'm simply asking you...

DL: His statement today says...

VD: ...if the siege breaks international law.

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DL: ...that people should have access – and I have said to you, Victoria, I'm not here as an international lawyer, that is a determine of the UN and its agencies and the ICC, it's not a determination from me. But of course I hear what people are saying and their concerns about civilian casualties in Gaza. But I want to assert this, and it's hugely important, because I spoke to Yair Lapid yesterday, the former Prime Minister of Israel, he wanted to make the point – and asked me to make this point on the show, that of course we also know that Hamas use people as a shelter—

VD: As human shields.

DL: As human shields in this context. And that is an important context to bear in mind.

VD: Sure. The Labour leadership sent out an email yesterday to MPs and councillors, strongly advising them not to attend protests this weekend. Why?

DL: Lots of Members of Parliament are receiving messages from their constituents. In my constituency, I have the historic Stamford Hill area, a natural home of the Jewish people over the last century, and lots of MPs have those pressures. It's important that as we face and want to be the next government that people do not share platforms with people who do not share Labour values, that they're careful and cautious. And we see Labour Members of Parliament exercise that caution over the last few days and I think that must be right.

VD: So are you saying – because again I want to be clear – if you're a Labour MP or Labour councillor you shouldn't go, for example, to a pro-Palestinian rally?

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DL: If you're a Labour MP you should always be careful whom you share platforms with at this moment, and you should be very careful that you do nothing to drive division in our communities.

VD: Okay.

DL: There's a rise in antisemitism, there's a rise in Islamophobia in our country as I speak...

VD: And are you saying – just so I'm clear—

DL: ...and as an MP, in a position of responsibility, you do everything to minimise those who would sow division.

VD: And are you saying they can't go to a pro-Israel rally?

DL: Guidance has gone out, it's very clear what that guidance is. People have a right to protest in our country, it's a right we defend because we're a democracy, just as we defend the rule of law and international law, so people have the right to protest. But we as leaders in our community should be very judicious and careful I think at this time. That's the right thing to do, and it's particularly the right thing to do if you hope one day to be the government.

VD: Thank you very much for being with us. Thank you, Shadow Foreign Secretary, David Lammy.

ENDS