

# **silences its own critics**

written by Prof. Zaki Shalom | 17.08.2025

On August 12, the US State Department published its annual report on the state of human rights around the world. Among other things, the report states that there are “credible reports of serious restrictions on freedom of expression in the United Kingdom.” The report determined that the state of human rights in Britain in 2024 had worsened, particularly since Prime Minister Keir Starmer was elected on July 4, 2024. During the year, the report states, the British government repeatedly intervened to limit free speech.

State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce declared that restrictions on freedom of speech in Britain are “intolerable in a free society.” The United States, she emphasized, views free expression as a “foundational component” of the functioning of democracy. Freedom of speech, she added, only strengthens the resilience of a democratic society. Government censorship of speech is intolerable in a free society.

## **Restrictions on free expression**

It should be recalled that Vice President JD Vance already raised the issue of deteriorating free speech in Britain in his speech at the Munich Conference in February 2025. He then asserted that restrictions on free expression pose a greater danger to Europe than Russia.

Vance also brought up this issue during meetings between Starmer and US President Donald Trump. He further claimed that British citizens feel betrayed since the ruling elites of Britain opened its gates to millions of unrestricted immigrants.

Recently, reports have surfaced in the British media about government efforts to secretly monitor publications on social media. The official justification for that was concern for the safety of children. However, many have voiced concerns that the true purpose is to restrict criticism of the regime.

A member of the US House Judiciary Committee, Jim Jordan, recently claimed that in Britain, a person who writes a malicious post on social media can face a longer prison sentence than someone who commits a violent crime. Former British education secretary Sir Gavin Williamson argued that the British government supports free expression only so long as it reflects views it agrees with.

# Condemnations of Israel

The harsh criticism of Britain's civil rights policies at home has not deterred the British prime minister from repeatedly issuing fierce condemnations of Israel and its violations of the rights of Gaza's residents. Here are just two examples: On June 4, 2025, Starmer described Israel's policy in Gaza as "appalling, counterproductive, and intolerable." On July 24, 2025, he sharply criticized what he called the "starvation" imposed by Israel on Gaza's residents, stressing that this was a move "indefensible in any way."

Netanyahu stressed a few days ago in a television interview that in his conversations with European leaders, they admit to him that they "know the truth" about what is actually happening in Gaza, but that they are subject to difficult pressures that force them to repeatedly condemn Israel publicly.

Few in Israel are aware of the harsh criticism now being directed in both the United States and within Britain itself against the level of free expression in the British kingdom - long celebrated as the "mother of parliaments" and as a model of democracy.

The Israeli media does not reflect this reality. The result is a distorted picture, as though Europe's leaders are "champions of civil liberty" who, from their moral high ground, are entitled to criticize Israel's policies as it fights for its existence against brutal terror organizations.

One can understand the efforts of European leaders to downplay the criticism they face. It is harder to understand why the State of Israel repeatedly bows its head before its critics. True, there are significant "power gaps" between us and them. Yet we, too, possess sources of strength that we can use to somewhat ease the pressure on us. Among other things, we can cause them to show restraint in their criticism of Israel in light of their own domestic situation. It is a pity that we do not do so. Published in The Jerusalem Post, August 18, 2025.