

Britain Puts International Law at the Heart of Foreign Policy Under Starmer

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Under Keir Starmer's leadership, the UK government is making a bold promise: that international law will no longer be treated as a side note in foreign policy but will sit firmly at its core. Attorney General Richard Hermer has become the loudest voice championing this shift, arguing that the strength of Britain's global standing now depends not on military might or diplomatic maneuvering, but on adherence to rules and legal

norms. In a time when global trust is fragile and alliances strained, Hermer's message is as clear as it is controversial: Britain will lead with principle, or it won't lead at all.

Hermer's stance isn't just theoretical. Since Labour came to power, the government has already made a series of striking decisions that reflect this legal-first approach. These include temporarily halting arms exports to Israel in light of humanitarian concerns in Gaza, acknowledging international rulings on British territories like the Chagos Islands, and refusing to shy away from the possibility of enforcing International Criminal Court warrants, even against powerful allies. These moves, while praised by some as courageous, have also drawn criticism for being too cautious or naive in a world driven more by power than by principle.

At the heart of Hermer's vision is a concept he calls "progressive realism." He argues that the only way to maintain moral authority and international influence is through unwavering commitment to legal accountability, even when it's uncomfortable. He warns against "simplistic narratives" that justify aggressive foreign policies or sideline global institutions. To Hermer and Starmer, Britain's future lies not in mimicking the hard-nosed strategies of rising powers, but in proving that democratic values and international law can still shape outcomes in a volatile world.

However, critics are already pushing back. Some former ministers and military voices claim that this approach risks weakening Britain's ability to act decisively. They argue that global threats, from Iran's provocations to Russia's ongoing aggression in Ukraine, demand agility and strength, not legal lectures. Others fear this legalism may alienate allies who operate with a different set of priorities.

Yet Hermer remains firm: the rule of law isn't just a legal doctrine; it's Britain's best chance at long-term relevance. As crises unfold and hard choices loom, the real test will be whether the UK can hold its legal and moral line when political pressure mounts. Is this a principled pivot or idealism in overdrive? Time and global events will tell.