

OpenVoiceNews U.K.

Transparent. Unbiased. Yours.

Starmer Faces Row Over Rights of IRA vs. Veterans

July 13, 2025

– Categories: Human Rights



Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has pledged to repeal the 2023 Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act, a move that has prompted criticism from veterans' groups and Conservative figures who argue it risks undermining protections extended to former British Armed Forces personnel. Critics warn this shift threatens to reopen legal action against ex-servicemen who served honourably during the Troubles, while potentially allowing former terrorists to exploit human rights laws for personal gain.

The 2023 Legacy Act, passed by the previous Conservative government, aimed to protect veterans of the British Armed Forces from what many have described as politically motivated prosecutions tied to incidents during Operation Banner, a military deployment in Northern Ireland that lasted from 1969 to 2007. The act effectively ended retrospective legal action in cases already scrutinised by prior investigations. Its repeal has sparked widespread backlash, particularly from Conservative lawmakers and military advocates.

At the heart of the controversy is the charge that Starmer's government is pushing a form of "two-tier justice." Former Cabinet minister Sir David Davis criticised the repeal, warning it could reopen legal scrutiny into veterans' actions during Operation Banner. He described the potential for prosecution as rewriting history and suggested it might deter armed forces recruitment.

Former Defence Minister Mark Francois warned that repealing the Act risks restarting investigations into former servicemen who served during the Troubles, potentially causing distress among ageing veterans; critics question whether adequate safeguards are in place.

The move to scrap the law comes despite a petition signed by nearly 170,000 individuals demanding that the government uphold protections for veterans who fought against terrorism. The concern extends beyond legal matters; it raises questions about national memory, loyalty, and the message sent to those who served their country under the most difficult circumstances.

Starmer has defended the repeal by arguing that the legislation was ruled unlawful, claiming it granted immunity even to those accused of terrorism. He also pointed out that the law lacked support from communities in Northern Ireland. Yet this justification has done little to calm fears among military families and lawmakers, who see the move as an attack on the integrity and sacrifice of those who defended the United Kingdom from domestic terrorism.

Labour has emphasised ongoing support for Operation Banner veterans, and Northern Ireland Secretary Hilary Benn has stated the government will retain non-immunity parts of the Act and explore alternative protections, though no full replacement legislation has yet been outlined, leaving veterans and their advocates concerned about legal vulnerabilities.

As the debate unfolds in Westminster, the core issue remains whether the government will stand firm in protecting those who served or continue down a path many view as rewriting history to appease politically motivated actors. The fallout from repealing the Legacy Act

could define the relationship between the government and its Armed Forces for years to come.

[Download IPFS](#)