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Green deputy leader defends comments on Leeds rabbi

**Sam Francis**

Political reporter

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Green Party deputy leader Mothn Ali has defended his criticism of a Leeds-based Rabbi and Israeli Defence Force (IDF) reservist.

Rabbi Zecharia Deutsch had accused Ali of playing a key role in the wave of threats that drove him from his home.

Green leader Zach Polanski has been under pressure to take action but is standing by his deputy.

Speaking to the BBC, Ali called for Rabbi Deutsch and "anyone who participates in a genocide" to be investigated by the police. Ali described the death of two **Jewish people in an attack at a synagogue in Manchester** on Thursday as "an absolute tragedy" and expressed solidarity with the Jewish community.

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In September, **The Times newspaper reported** that Rabbi Deutsch left his Leeds home under advice from West Yorkshire police following a deluge of threats linked to his work with the IDF.

Speaking to the Times, Rabbi Deutsch blamed Ali, who is a member of Leeds City Council, for playing a key role in amplifying the attacks through his posts on social media.

The Times reported that Rabbi Deutsch had been working as a student chaplain at Leeds University at the time of the 7 October attacks in 2023.

An Israeli citizen, he was called up as a reservist for a tour of duty with the Israel Defence Forces. Rabbi Deutsch reportedly acted as a guard for food and ammunition convoys entering Gaza during his service.

In one video on a now private social media account, Ali said: "Leeds University should be protecting its students against this kind of animal.

"You should be protecting people. You should be protecting students from this kind of animal, because if he's willing to kill people over there, how do you

know he's not going to kill your students over here?"

Ali has not disputed the content of the video when asked by the BBC.

He said: "I think anyone who participates in a genocide is a danger and should be investigated by the police."

"I don't believe that British people, people who enjoy the freedoms of this country, should be able to go into a foreign state and participate in genocide."

Separately, Ali apologised for the "short sightedness" of a post he made the day after the 7 October attacks, where he said "indigenous people have the right to fight back" and called for an end to "white supremacist European settler colonialism".

Speaking to the BBC, Ali argued he had not been referencing the Hamas attack on Israeli civilians - killing about 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages.

He reiterated that the post referred to principles "enshrined in international law" and was not directly linked to the events of that day.

Defending his position, Ali said he had been elected as deputy leader by more than 5,000 Green Party members who "put their trust in me because they recognise that I work for our community as a whole".

"Politicians have a responsibility in how they communicate, but also the media have a responsibility in how they communicate," he added.

"We shouldn't conflate what's happening in Israel to British Jews here - I think that is irresponsible.

"We need to express our solidarity with British Jews in this country, we need to express our solidarity with all marginalised communities in this country."

Ali became a councillor for Gipton and Harehills ward in May 2024 and immediately hit the headlines for his victory speech, labelling his election a "win for the people of Gaza" before shouting "Allahu Akbar", meaning "God is the greatest" in Arabic.

He later apologised for "any upset" caused.

Green Party leader Zack Polanski stood by Ali in an interview on the morning of the party's annual conference, saying his views needed to be seen in context that "this Rabbi went off to fight for the IDF, he was actively recruiting for people to engage in a genocide".

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme Polanski said Ali was right to apologise, but he would "defend his right to be annoyed and upset by what is

happening in Palestine".

"We need to have a nuanced conversation about what is a genocide and talk about what is actually happening as opposed to the words that people use."

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