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UK PM Starmer accused of 'blatant dishonesty' over Epstein-linked envoy

The prime minister has refused to step down, claiming he was unaware Peter Mandelson, a friend of the convicted sex trafficker, had failed his security vetting

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UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer is facing new calls to resign after it was confirmed that disgraced former British Ambassador to the US Peter Mandelson had been appointed despite not being cleared by security officials.

Mandelson, who was London's envoy in Washington between February and September 2025,



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was arrested earlier this year over allegations that he leaked sensitive British government data to late convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaking to the media. © Getty Images / Alastair Grant

The media claimed he continued friendly relations with Epstein even after the disgraced financier's imprisonment in 2008, while also receiving money from him.

The Guardian reported on Thursday that Mandelson had failed the vetting by the Cabinet Office in 2024, but the Foreign Office ignored its recommendations and still made the 72-year-old ambassador.

Downing Street confirmed the report, but stressed that Starmer, who previously assured the parliament that *"due process"* had been followed in the envoy's appointment, was unaware of Mandelson's security clearance problems.



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On Thursday, top Foreign Office civil servant Oly Robbins was sacked over the scandal. He has been formally asked to give evidence on Mandelson's vetting on Tuesday.

Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch told BBC that it was *"completely preposterous"* for the Labour government to claim that Starmer didn't know about the situation.

"This story does not stack up. The prime minister is taking us for fools. All roads lead to a resignation," she stressed.

Ed Davey, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, insisted that Starmer *"must go"* if he really misled the parliament and the public.

Starmer is refusing to step down, telling journalists on Friday that he was *"absolutely furious"* over not having been informed about Mandelson's failed vetting, calling it *"staggering"* and *"unforgivable."* He promised to address the lawmakers on Monday to *"set out all the relevant*

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facts in true transparency."

However, the British media appears to be unconvinced by the prime minister's excuses. On Friday, The Times warned about *"a new crisis for Starmer, whose premiership almost collapsed over the Mandelson scandal in February."*

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The headline in the Daily Mail read: *"Starmer on brink as his Mandelson 'lies' are exposed,"* while the Express insisted that the prime minister *"must resign after blatant lies to MPs."* The Telegraph described the PM's position as *"scarcely credible,"* adding that *"he cannot survive."*

The Mandelson affair has already dealt a heavy blow to Starmer's team, with his chief of staff, Morgan McSweeney, quitting in February after taking the blame for the appointment of an envoy with known links to Epstein.

McSweeney's departure was followed by that of the prime minister's communications director, Tim Allan, who said he was stepping down to allow Starmer to build a *"new team."*

The British royal family and Andrew, the younger brother of King Charles III, have also been hit by the new trove of Epstein documents. Already stripped of his titles over his ties to the late sex offender, the ex-prince is now facing allegations of *"misconduct in public office"* due to allegedly supplying Epstein with sensitive documents.

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