

# [***UK's Sunak criticizes a Conservative’s attack on London mayor and denies Islamophobia accusations***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BDS-RH11-JC5B-G0RX-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** JILL LAWLESS, Associated Press

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**Body**

LONDON — British Prime Minister [*Rishi Sunak*](https://apnews.com/hub/rishi-sunak) said on Monday that a Conservative lawmaker was wrong to say the [*mayor of London is controlled by Islamists*](https://apnews.com/article/britain-london-mayor-sadiq-khan-conservatives-islamophobia-74c5574aa7114f557786966630b1c491), and denied his party tolerates anti-Muslim prejudice.

Sunak was pressured to condemn Islamophobia after the comments by Lee Anderson about Mayor Sadiq Khan, amid growing tensions within British ***politics*** over the [*Israel-Hamas war*](https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war). The Conservative lawmaker claimed Islamists had “got control” of Khan and the city of London. Khan is Muslim and a member of the opposition Labour Party.

Anderson — a pugnacious populist — was suspended from the Conservative Party group in Parliament on Saturday, a day after he made the comments.

“These comments weren’t acceptable. They were wrong,” Sunak told BBC radio on Monday. “Words matter, especially in the current environment where tensions are running high, and I think it’s incumbent on all of us to choose them carefully.”

Asked whether his party has an Islamophobia problem, Sunak was quick to say: “No, of course it doesn’t.”

“Racism or prejudice of any kind is completely unacceptable. It’s not British and we must stamp it out where we see it,” he added.

Opponents accused the Conservatives of deliberately raising tensions — in an election year — over pro-Palestinian protests that have been held most weekends, drawing [*hundreds of thousands of demonstrators*](https://apnews.com/article/britain-israel-palestinian-protest-cenotaph-e57e2ec31af2fab16660161e5ed85ae8), since the Israel-Hamas conflict began in October. Sunak fired former [*Home Secretary Suella Braverman in November*](https://apnews.com/article/fired-braverman-british-sunak-government-8c101f1f08c80e750d2623cc61203feb) after she called the protests “hate marches” and accused police of being too lenient with them.

The protests have been overwhelmingly peaceful, though there have been several dozen arrests over signs and chants allegedly supporting Hamas, a banned organization in Britain. Jewish organizations and many lawmakers say the mass marches have created an intimidating atmosphere for Jewish Londoners.

In an interview with right-wing TV channel GB News, Anderson criticized the police response to the demonstrations, leveling the blame at the mayor. He said: “The Islamists \u2026 (have) got control of Khan and they’ve got control of London,” and claimed Khan had “given our capital city away to his mates.”

The suspension means Anderson, a deputy chairman of the Conservatives until last month, will sit in Parliament as an independent unless he joins another party such as the right-wing Reform U.K., formerly known as the Brexit Party.

Labour said the Conservatives must go further to tackle prejudice, noting that the party said Anderson was suspended for refusing to apologize rather than for his original comments about Khan.

Writing in the Evening Standard newspaper, Khan said Anderson’s comments had “poured petrol on the fire” of hatred against Muslims. He said some Conservatives were adopting “a deliberate, dangerous political strategy — a strategy to weaponize anti-Muslim prejudice for electoral gain.”

Anderson said Monday that he would not apologize and renewed his criticism of the mayor, saying Khan had “stood by and allowed our police to turn a blind eye to the disgusting scenes around Parliament.” That was an apparent reference to a pro-Palestinian protest last week when the slogan: “ [*From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”*](https://apnews.com/article/river-sea-israel-gaza-hamas-protests-d7abbd756f481fe50b6fa5c0b907cd49) was projected onto Parliament's Big Ben clocktower.

Many Palestinians see the slogan as a call for an independent state and an end to decades of Israeli military rule over millions of Palestinians while others perceive it as a call for Israel’s destruction.

Anderson's suspension comes as [*tensions over the Israel-Hamas war*](https://apnews.com/article/britain-parliament-gaza-debate-speaker-lindsay-hoyle-406d7a3e1cb53aa110297f10466dbfa2) roil British ***politics***, with some lawmakers saying they fear for their safety after receiving threats over their positions on the conflict. Reports of both antisemitic and anti-Muslim abuse in Britain have soared since Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel, which triggered the war in Gaza.

Last week an attempt to [*hold a House of Commons vote*](https://apnews.com/article/uk-parliament-gaza-cease-fire-vote-c394d17657c32ab861b3a121d0954f18) calling for a cease-fire descended into chaos after House of Commons Speaker Lindsay Hoyle departed from parliamentary custom by allowing votes on motions from three different parties, sparking a walkout by the Conservatives and Scottish National Party.

Hoyle said he had been trying to ensure that all lawmakers had the chance to make their positions clear in a climate of threat and intimidation. He is currently facing calls for his resignation.

The Gaza war has also upended a special election this week for the northwest England seat of Rochdale. The Labour Party [*disowned its candidate*](https://apnews.com/article/uk-labour-candidate-israel-gaza-a410e551de7bb8c8fdec1f7f386f94bb) for Thursday’s contest, Azhar Ali, for claiming that Israel allowed Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack to happen as a pretext [*to invade Gaza*](https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war).

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