



By: TA | AP Brief

Starmmer faces more pressure over Mandelson ambassador appointment



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer faces more heat Tuesday over his appointment of Peter Mandelson as ambassador to Washington, with lawmakers set to vote on whether he should be investigated by a parliamentary standards watchdog over the ill-fated decision.

Starmer's former chief of staff Morgan McSweeney also is due to testify to a group of legislators probing how Mandelson, a scandal-tainted friend of Jeffrey Epstein, was given the key diplomatic job despite failing **security checks**.

The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee will quiz McSweeney on Tuesday morning, before the whole house debates a demand by the opposition Conservative Party for Parliament's Privileges Committee to investigate Starmer's explanations of how Mandelson came to be appointed.

Both are potentially dangerous moments for Starmer, who has spent weeks fending off **calls to resign** over the Mandelson saga.

Starmer **fired Mandelson** in September after new details emerged about the ambassador's friendship with Epstein, a convicted sex offender who died in prison in 2019.

Police opened an **investigation** into Mandelson in February over allegations he passed on sensitive government information to Epstein when he was a member of the British government in 2009.

McSweeney, a protégé of Mandelson who served as Starmer's top aide, resigned in February, saying he took responsibility for appointing him as ambassador.

He is certain to be asked about allegations by Olly Robbins, the former top civil servant at the Foreign Office, that Starmer's staff **pressured officials** to rush through the confirmation so Mandelson could be in the post at the start of U.S. President Donald Trump's second term.

Evidence of bad judgment

Starmer has denied that anyone in his office put pressure on the civil service.

The prime minister fired Robbins earlier this month after the revelation that Mandelson was approved for the job against the recommendation of the government's security vetting agency.

Starmer has called it "staggering" that Foreign Office officials failed to tell him about the security concerns.

Critics say Starmer's decision to appoint Mandelson in the first place is evidence of **bad judgment** by a prime minister who has made repeated missteps since he led the center-left Labour Party to a landslide election victory in July 2024.

Starmer already defused one **potential crisis** in February, when some Labour lawmakers urged him to quit over the Mandelson appointment.

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He could face a new challenge if, as expected, Labour takes a hammering in local and regional elections on May 7, which give voters a chance to pass a midterm verdict on the government.

It's unclear whether enough Labour lawmakers will vote with the opposition on Tuesday to refer Starmer to the Privileges Committee, which has the power to suspend lawmakers, including the prime minister, from Parliament, for breaches of the rules.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch said Starmer had "misled the House of Commons repeatedly" when he said "full due process" was followed over Mandelson's appointment.

The prime minister's office called Tuesday's vote "a desperate political stunt by the Conservative Party the week before the May elections."

Censure by the committee also exerts considerable moral pressure to resign. Its investigation into lockdown-breaking gatherings in government offices during the COVID-19 pandemic helped end the political career of former Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Johnson quit as a lawmaker in 2023 after the committee found that he had repeatedly misled Parliament over the “Partygate” scandal.