

## Audio file

[119009-PalestineActionTheTruthBehindtheBan.mp3](#)

## Transcript

A suspected terrorism offense is about to unfold here in the heart of London. This is the group right here. I think, oh, they're about to do it, whatever it is. It's a banner that reads, I Support Palestine Action. Three policemen have just come, and a bunch of police officers have just come out. Section 13 Terrorism Act to support Palestine Action. Over the last year, there have been over two and a half thousand arrests in the UK for supporting the group, after the government officially banned them under the Terrorism Act.

I support Palestine Action.

They should be arresting the real terrorists. Watch backs, please, guys. Well done. Thank you very much. Palestine Action are radical activists. who break into factories and military bases as a form of protest they call direct action. The group and the government's decision to ban them have divided the country. They're scumbags. They're not ISIS. Yeah. I think they've got their knickers in a twist. Let these people realize that there are consequences to their illegal actions. Yeah. Some say they are dangerous extremists.

This is an organization that, in its bones, wants to frighten people.

Could they even be connected to a foreign regime? She's in Tehran, on Iranian state television, chanting, Death to America, death to Israel. Others see them as heroic activists fighting an alleged genocide.

Nothing compares with stopping a genocide.

The protests have quickly become the biggest act of civil disobedience in the country's recent history. Police have arrested around 150 people. More than 200 people.

900 people were arrested in London at the weekend.

Many are accusing the government of crushing free speech, but they're not backing down.

People don't know the full nature of this organization. This is not a non-violent organization.

I've witnessed a Palestine action break-in firsthand in Ireland. The police still haven't come. It's already been about half an hour. I can hear the sounds of things being broken

up in there. I've talked exclusively to an activist from one of their most controversial actions. and investigated the truth behind the Home Office's decision. What you're saying, it just seems so different from how the government has described their reasoning. All in pursuit of one question. Was the government right to ban Palestine action? On October 7th, 2023, Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups attacked Israel, killing over 1,200 people and abducting 251. Since then, Israel's response has killed 70,000 people in Gaza, among them 20,000 children. According to a UN commission, Israel's actions amount to genocide. Anger over the bloodshed led one group in the UK to take extreme action. 30 a.m. on August 6, 2024, and activists are about to break into a factory It's run by Elbit Systems UK, a subsidiary of Israel's largest weapons manufacturer, though it denies supplying parts for the Israeli army. The activists are from Palestine Action, a group dedicated to stopping weapons sales to Israel and ending what they claim is complicity with a genocidal and apartheid regime, something Israel strongly denies. Right, you're under arrest for criminal damage and a Among those arrested for the break-in is my friend, Ellie Cameo. No, you don't have to do that legally. You don't have to do that. I've got... Ow, you're \*\*\*\*\* hurting me. You're \*\*\*\*\* hurting me. Ellie's arrest over a year ago was the first time I or any of our friends had heard about Palestine Action. She's been held on remand ever since, and now some of her co-defendants have been hospitalized as part of a hunger strike. So who is this group that Eli's involved with? Since Eli was arrested, Palestine action has been put on the UK's terror list, alongside ISIS, al-Qaeda, and neo-Nazi groups. I want to find out why the government took the unprecedented decision to prescribe a direct action group. Prescribed is just a fancy word for banned, basically, but under the Terrorism Act, it's not just the group that's banned. Meeting with someone from the group may, in many instances, be banned. Downloading their videos and material may also be banned. Basically, anything that we need to do to investigate this group could land us on the wrongs of the law and technically get us arrested. Because of this, we've been told to run our investigation in complete digital isolation. All right, so look at this. This is Yvette Cooper, the Home Secretary, who made this decision.

It's based on violent action and injuries that this group has taken, including on national security targets, but also injuries to people, and also some disturbing information referring to future planning as well.

So she's sort of implying that... She and the government have some kind of disturbing secret info about what Palestine Action are really up to that we don't yet know about.

There will be people who do not know what the nature of this group is. But I would say to people, this is not a non-violent organization.

Many MPs across the house disagreed with the government's decision to ban Palestine Action.

Prescribing Palestine Action would be a draconian overreach.

There are plenty of other legal methods that could be used to deal with this form of extremism. But ultimately, Parliament did approve the ban. Some say it was because Palestine Action was lumped into a single vote with two neo-Nazi groups, the Maniac Murder Cult and the Russian Imperial Movement.

So the eyes have it. The eyes have it. Unlock.

With so much disagreement, what is the real truth about Palestine Action? To find out, I need to see the group in action. The UK branch has disbanded since the ban, but there are independent splinter groups across the world that do not fall under the prescription. So we've been speaking to a member of Palestine Action Ireland. Even though the group isn't prescribed here, the stuff they do is still legal, and speaking to us could get him in a lot of trouble. Our source, who calls himself Dee, wants to remain anonymous because Palestine Action Ireland is planning something. So, what is Palestine Action Ireland?

So, we cause property damage in order to, like, economically sabotage our targets. Ultimately, we want to impose a cost on our targets so that the cost of dropping their ties with Elvis or stopping their connection with Israel is higher than the benefits of continuing to do so.

I see. Do you think it's up to you as a citizen to make that decision?

Israel has killed thousands of people. People have been marching, petitioning, appealing to government officials. But all of that has amounted basically to nothing.

Whatever Palestine Action have planned, we're told it's happening tonight. All right, so it's 4 A.m., and we've just got a text message from Dee. This is the location we've been told to wait at. That could be them right there. Look in the orange high there's vests. What are you planning when you get up there?

To try to visit Elbit and any affiliates, Collins Aerospace, right beyond RTX. We're trying to do the job that the government should be doing.

Once they get onto the building, the vandalism begins. Collins Aerospace works with Elbit Systems USA and is also a subsidiary of RTX, an arms company that supplies hardware to the Israeli army. But Collins says this office only handles non-military contracts. It's already been about half an hour. I can hear the sounds of things being broken up in there. By the time these people come to work in the morning, their entire office could be completely destroyed. An hour on, and the smashing is complete. All that's left is for the activists to get arrested. By the time the police arrive in the morning, the two activists have locked themselves to the balcony. When Dee told us to come here at 5 a.m., I had no idea I would be here eight hours later, watching two people being dragged away on a crane. Eventually, the two are arrested and charged with

trespass with the intent to cause criminal damage and burglary. We oppose genocide. We support Palestine action. In the UK, Actions like this could now get you charged with terrorism. It's this harsher approach that's ignited a bitter debate. I'm trying to find out why Palestine Action UK was banned as a terrorist organization. My friend Ellie Cameo is now on trial, charged with aggravated burglary, criminal damage, and violent disorder. The prosecution is about to present evidence they say shows that Palestine Action is willing to use violence. The footage shows the six defendants holding sledgehammers inside Albert's Bristol factory. The prosecution say they were prepared to use them as weapons. Get your \*\*\*\*\* out! An activist called Samuel Corner is seen striking and injuring a police officer on the back. Some of the defendants say they were acting in self-defense and that a security guard swung a sledgehammer at them. The incident at Elbit's Bristol factory appears to be the only one where there are allegations that people have been injured by Palestine Action activists, even though the group claims to have carried out 500 protests. But as Palestine Action's campaign has expanded to accountants, property firms, banks, and even universities, A group called the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism says their activity has created a climate of fear for the Jewish community.

There's just been years now of people turning up at their places of work, usually places of work, finding that everything's covered in red paint, the computers have all been smashed. These are thuggish, violent attacks.

Palestine Action targeted an office block in London in 2024. It used to be the registered address for Bicom, a pro-Israel advocacy firm that works closely with politicians and the media, but their actual office was based elsewhere.

It is very hard to see in some of these attacks what links there are that would legitimize this kind of thuggery. There is a common thread, though, that connects those seemingly unrelated attacks, and that tends to be that they are Jewish-owned businesses.

We wouldn't pass an action say that, you know, Bicom advocates for continued arms sales to Israel. I wonder if there's a risk of conflating criticism of Israel with an attack on the Jewish population more generally.

The fear that they cause in the Jewish community may not be their primary objective, but I think it's incidental to what they do. The government allowed this to happen. The police failed to act time and time again. And it wasn't until R.A.F. Bryce Norton gets attacked that the government finally says, actually maybe we should be doing something about this. That was very frustrating for a lot of us.

It was Palestine Action's break in a Bryce Norton to graffiti RAF planes that saw them added to the government's list of prescribed international terror groups, a list that includes neo-Nazis and al-Qaeda.

The announcement of a ban on Palestine action did follow the break-in at RAF Brize Norton in June 2025. It was their first action against a UK military base. But I've seen documents that reveal Yvette Cooper was considering prosecution for five months prior to the announcement. So, could there be another reason why they wanted to ban them under the Terrorism Act? I think I found something today that could be that disturbing information. So it was reported in the Times that the Home Office is investigating a link to Iran. It says, Iran could be funding Palestine action, Home Office officials claimed. That's a huge claim. That changes things. The security services have been worried about Iran's activity on UK soil for years. after a series of cyberattacks and attempted assassinations. US intelligence now claim Iran is supporting pro-Palestine movements across the West in order to sow division. Okay, so I've been digging into this idea that Iran funds kind of left-wing anti-Israel protests in the West. This is a woman called Carla Walsh. She's one of the co-founders of Palestine Action US. And this video, she's in Tehran, on Iranian state television, chanting, Death to America, death to Israel.

Glory to all the martyrs. Glory to the axis of resistance. May we see victory within our lifetimes. Margbar Amerika. Margbar Israel.

Carla Walsh is from Palestine Action USA, which says it's independent from the UK group. But one of her associates has admitted to financially supporting both chapters of the organization.

Very close to the front line between the Russians and the Ukrainians.

Fergi Chambers is a radical communist who happens to have inherited hundreds of millions of dollars. He can be seen here controversially posting about his journey to the Ukrainian front line with special access to Russian forces and using X to further promote his support for a Russian victory. He says America is his enemy. He's called Iran downright heroic, and he also backs Hamas, the Iran-backed militant group that attacked Israel on October 7th and is prescribed as a terrorist organization in the UK and across Europe. Could he be the link to the Iranian regime that the Home Office was reportedly referring to? He rejects our initial requests, but suddenly he agrees to chat. Hello. Hey, how are you? I'm all right.

How are you?

Good, Thanks for speaking to me. The Home Office in the UK has briefed journalists to say that they're investigating a link between past and action and Iran. Some people have said that that's...

That's really crazy. Whenever anyone either explicitly offers a political opinion, which is kind of counter to the respectable imperialist narrative. They try to talk about, working for this or that state. I've never been there. I don't have contacts in the government

there. I know some imam's there, but I don't, I have connections to that, and I certainly don't think anyone in Palestine Action does.

Have they ever, like, either Iran or Hamas, or I guess even Russia, ever reached out to you about...

No, we may be in solidarity with some foreign struggle. I mean, I support Hamas. Do I materially support them? No. I don't have the means or the capability to do that, and it's illegal to the point that it would endanger the other work I do in an unnecessary and unstrategic way.

Are you still able to support Hamas, given that they also kill civilians, including children, for example, on October 7th?

There's no such thing as an active settler who's a civilian. I've never seen one shred of evidence that Hamas has targeted a child.

But do children have died as a result of -- for example, on October 7th, there were children who died?

So there was an incredibly amount of friendly fire, and it's actually not clear who's responsible for what on that day.

Yeah, but come on.

But if you don't, I'm absolutely not going to believe how a liberation struggle wants to exercise its right to achieve that end of liberation. when they've been met with nothing but blood for generations. And I find it offensive to even ask the question.

According to Amnesty International, 36 children were killed by militants on October 7th. And against that backdrop, many would probably find Chambers' open support of Hamas shocking. Now, he denies funneling money on behalf of the Iranian regime, but maybe we're focusing on the wrong question. As some critics have argued, maybe when it comes to Iran, Hamas, and Palestine action, it's less a question of financial ties and more a question of ideological alignment. Hey. Great to see you. Good to see you. I've been invited to a small protest by Emma Cameo, the mother of my friend Ellie. So what's in the coffin-shaped box?

A lot of evidence to support the fact that Elbit Systems are committing war crimes.

So you want the UK police to investigate Elbit Systems?

UK, yes.

Elbit Systems UK denies supplying the Israeli army. But it's the man campaigning with Emma who's caught my attention. Frank McGuinness is a lawyer who represented Hamas. in its bid to overturn its own UK terrorism ban. He's here in a personal capacity,

but his highly controversial views on the state of Israel align with those of Hamas. Like the so-called state of Israel, Elbit's system has no right to exist.

We are going to defeat and dismantle the so-called state of Israel, shut Elbit down as part of the broader struggle for Palestinian emancipation from the river to the sea. Thanks very much.

As well as representing Hamas, McGinnis tells me he used to represent Palestine Action UK, too. Is he yet another controversial figure who just happens to be associated with Palestine Action? Or do the organization's leaders also share this desire to destroy Israel? I've been looking into Palestine Action's founders, and I've found something interesting. So, this guy here... Richard Barnard. He is facing charges under the Terrorism Act for allegedly making comments in support of Hamas. And there's not much more we can really say about him because his criminal proceedings are ongoing. There's another founder of Palestine Action UK. Her name is Huda Amouri. This whole time we've been meeting with Palestine Action's critics and associates. But the one person who can tell us what the group really stands for is Huda Amori herself. Through a source, we managed to make contact. I'm on my way to meet the founder of a terrorist organization. She's not currently facing any charges under the Terrorism Act, as far as we know, because the group was technically disbanded. But she has asked us not to disclose her current location. Hi, Hedda. Hi. Thanks for meeting with us. This is the first face-to-face interview she has given since the prescription of Palestine Action. Are you kind of the leader of, well, I guess what's technically now the biggest domestic terror organisation in the UK?

Well, that's a funny way of pulling it, isn't it? Palestine Action wasn't about taking lives. It was about saving lives in Palestine. It's the very opposite of what a terrorist organisation is to most people.

But you're breaking the law.

But we argue that our actions are actually lawful because we're acting to prevent a much greater war crime. We're acting to protect lives in Palestine.

Has it worked?

In many cases, yes. There have been Israeli weapons factories in Britain, which have had to permanently shut down. But what I would say as well is that every action that stops the production of these weapons, if it's for a day, if it's for a week, if it's for a month, is... a victory in and of itself.

Some people have said that the actions of Palestinian Action activists have created a kind of climate of fear for Jewish people in the UK. What do you say to those allegations?

Palestinian Action had targeted companies regardless of the identities of the owners. It was never about that. It was about the connection to the Israeli weapons industry. So, to be honest, I think when these types of accusations come up, it's actually weaponizing anti-Semitism in a lot of ways, and it's deliberately obfuscating the facts.

The government has also mentioned concerns that Palestine Action is influenced or potentially funded by Iran.

I mean, it's a complete fabrication. The people who funded Palestine Action was, like, just ordinary people across the country who would give 20 quid here and there. But you can say you're investigating anyone for anything to create that, you know, element of doubt and to muddy a situation.

There's also the issue that some members of Palace In Action have been accused of saying things in support of Hamas and are saying things in support of the October 7th massacre as well.

Yeah. You know, it's easy to go and, like, pick and say, Oh, this person got accused of this thing. And it's about what Palestine Action was about. We were about shutting down the weapons industry.

Yeah. Is Hamas guilty of killing innocent civilians on October 7th? And should we condemn that?

Every single life is sacred. And I think we have to look at, like, what Palestine Action, as a group, is calling for, you know, that we are calling for protection of human life in Gaza.

It should still be simple to condemn the killing of innocent Israelis as well.

I think what I, um, struggle with is the fact that I, um, you know, as a Palestinian, as an activist, need to... Condemn something to have some sort of legitimacy in this course.

No, there's no legal reason or any You know set in stone reason why you should have to condemn the actions of Hamas, but it's more that given the public perception of Palestine action and given what some members of Palestine action have said that you might want to you know Express that that you don't share those views.

What I can categorically say is that Palestine action has never tried to, you know, express support or glorify internationally prescribed groups. It has taken direct action against the Israeli weapons trades.

Many might find what Huda Omori says or doesn't say about Hamas and October 7th objectionable, but it isn't a terrorist offense. The Home Office. This and Palestine Action's critics have tried to justify the ban by pointing to some kind of extremist ideology or mysterious foreign backer. Amori denies all these allegations, and now a leaked report suggests the real reason for prescribing the group may have been far less

traumatic. I've got my hands on a leaked internal intelligence report on the group. This is MI5, MI6, counter-terrorism police. This is the official document. on the government's assessment of the terror threat of Palestine action. I've been through this, and we've heard so much about a potential link to Iran, ideological alignment with Hamas, violence against people. The reason that they say that this group crosses the line into terrorism is none of that. It's because three out of 385 total incidents mentioned had serious property damage to the extent that the group could be considered terrorist. Serious property damage carried out for an ideological or political cause technically meets the threshold for terrorism in the UK. The report says Palestine Action also crosses the legal threshold for prescription because they plan and promote this property damage. But just because they could prescribe Palestine Action, doesn't mean they had to. After months of controversy, Palestine Action have been granted permission to challenge the ban in the High Court. A major question the judges will need to answer is whether the ban is proportionate in relation to its impact on freedom of expression. The prescription process mostly occurs behind closed doors. But someone who is in the room as an observer has agreed to talk. Jonathan Hall is the government's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation.

What Palestine Action was doing was really serious damage. The assessment was made, and I think fairly, that the number of attacks that was happening was escalating, and also the nature of the attacks were getting more and more violent, so it wasn't good enough just to wait and see what they did, and then try and catch the people. But you had to do something about the recruitment and the funding. And that's where terrorism legislation comes in.

The government repeatedly did say that there was this disturbing plans for future attacks that, you know, if the public knew, you know, what we knew, then they may not be supportive of this organization.

Well, I regret that. I don't think it helps to sort of hint that there are sort of... major pieces of sort of potentially secret information that are hidden away. And the way in which the government has put their prescription case is to say that they are involved in terrorism because they cause serious damage to property.

But what you're saying, it just seems so different from how the government has described their reasoning. I mean, just think about the fact that the Home Office briefed some journalists, that they were investigating links between Palestine action and Iran. I mean...

Yeah, I don't understand that, and I think...

Was that a mistake?

Yeah, yeah, it's sort of nudge, nudge, wink, wink. Well, it's wrong, it's wrong. There's a challenge at the moment to the banning of Palestine action in the High Court. The High Court has power to look at secret evidence. So if there is secret evidence, the High Court will be able to look at that and determine it. But I don't agree with the idea of sort of nudge, nudge, wink, wink.

And if there is any secret evidence about Iran or Hamas, We won't be able to find it out, will we?

No. I mean, I don't think you should get too excited about that.

You don't think there's anything there?

Not that I'm aware of.

The government appeared to have briefed the media on potential Iranian links, spoken about the group's willingness to use violence and disturbing plans for future attacks, But these things aren't supported by their own independent advisor, nor their own internal intelligence report. Could the government have done this because they knew that a ban based on property damage alone would be unpopular? One, two, three, lift! You only have to look at the ongoing protests to see how much anger this ban has ignited. We've seen documents that might reveal that the government has overstated its justification for banning Palestine action to the public. The group only crossed the threshold because of the damage it caused to property. It's the first time that direct action activism has been prescribed in the UK, and protests have erupted across the country. Palestine! Why are you here today?

This legislation is such a huge overreach of our human rights, of our right to protest. And if our government can do this to Palestine Action when they clearly don't meet the criteria to be a terrorist organization, it's such a slippery slope, and it can happen to anyone.

There have already been seven protests since the prescription came into force two months ago. Today, another 1,000 people are expected in Parliament Square to hold signs reading I support Palestine Action. Big Ben has just bombed, which symbolizes the time that everyone now has to be quiet and write on their sign, I support Palestine Action, which then makes them arrestable. The police are already circling and getting ready to arrest. Expressing support for Palestine Action is now a terrorist offence, with a maximum sentence of six months. Absolute nonsense. This is no longer my country. I don't recognize it. For the government, the issue has snowballed from a ban on one group to a standoff with huge numbers of civilians willing to break the law to oppose their decision. It's an act of civil disobedience, organized by the campaign group Defend Our Juries, who have taken up the fight.

It is a genocide. We can see it's a genocide. Nothing compares with stopping A genocide. to prescribe Palestine action, people standing up for what's right. I mean, that is a misuse of our laws to shut down protests.

The government might say that there are plenty of ways to support Palestine that don't involve supporting a prescribed organization.

Hundreds of thousands of people marching. I've marched with my grandchildren. I've marched with my daughter and my son and my husband, and the government didn't listen.

Israel denies committing genocide and says that it's acting entirely in self-defense. But this isn't just about Gaza. People are now angry about what they see as an attack on free speech. Shame on you all! And the police are struggling to cope. Things are getting a bit more violent. Could the government's messaging around Palestine action be making these protests worse? The government has said on a couple of occasions that people who support our Palestine action don't really know the true nature of the organization. There could be something perhaps more sinister going on. What do you make of that? You know, if there is some kind of sinister underbelly to Palestine action, please tell me, please tell the people, please release that to the media. But until it's released, it doesn't exist, in my opinion. Eventually, nearly 500 people are arrested. And police aren't just targeting protesters.

You 2 live here? This is what happens. Britain in 2025. Opposing genocide?

Twenty-six-year-old Paddy Friend. is accused of helping organize the protests on behalf of Defend Our Juries. He was arrested under the Terrorism Act after a dawn raid of his home.

See you later, Paddy.

Hey, Paddy, it's Matt. We're just at the train station. Are you on your way here?

Yeah, we should be there in, like, five minutes.

Great. He's been charged with three counts of organizing support for a prescribed organization, and I've come to meet him as he attends a pre-trial hearing. Hey, Paddy. Hey, Matt. How's it going? Good to meet you. Good to meet you. Hey, Dara. Hi, I'm Dara. Dara, Matt, good to meet you. Shall we? Yeah. They're serious offenses with a maximum sentence of 14 years.

When they first arrested me, I kind of... in my head, I could do about two years. And that, I could do that. I don't know, I could do that and life would go on, but this is quite a life-altering amount of time. Which is pretty scary, to be honest.

The offenses took place on a public Zoom call, where Paddy is alleged to have briefed Defend Our Juries protesters, who are considering holding a sign in support of Palestine Action.

There's this sort of self-fulfilling logic where they say, Well, this is a prescribed organization. Therefore, you can't say anything. And the point is, we strongly disagree. We don't think they should have been prescribed. Freedom of speech is supposed to mean something, right? Freedom of expression. For it to actually retain its meaning, one needs to be able to express an opinion that the government doesn't like. They love you.

Whatever you think about passing action, the idea that someone could face up to 14 years in jail for organizing a protest in the UK is hard to get your head around. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe are both arguing that the UK's terrorism laws limit freedom of speech. The UN Commissioner also argues that serious property damage carried out for a political or ideological cause does not meet the international definition of terrorism. Lord Hayne was in government when the Terrorism Act was introduced in the year 2000.

There was no sense that I felt at the time as a government minister, no sense that it would be applied, for example, to Palestine Action protesters. There are plenty of provisions in the law, including criminal damage itself, that they can be charged with. There's no need, and nor is it justified, to label them terrorists. I'm worried that once you start labeling people terrorists, you then start catching all sorts of protesters. Would have caught the suffragettes, could have caught anti-apartheid protesters, and that cannot be justified.

This is no longer just about Palestine action. The country is now at a crucial turning point, where it's debating what it defines as terrorism and what it defines as protest.

Do you really think that there is a moral equivalence between someone who supports ISIS and somebody who supports Palestine action? It's an anti-West group that is attacking our military. The law itself is unworkable. They compare themselves to the suffragettes. I don't think there's any comparison there at all.

Defend Our Juries are holding another protest. If they hoped the mass arrests would force the government to lift the ban, the strategy isn't working. It's interesting how the police's tactics have changed. They've got police vans lined up all around Trafalgar Square, and they're sending groups of police in to pick people off one by one, process them here, put them in the van, and take them to the police station. The government, the police, the protesters, they're all doubling down. Sorry. The police are coming in thick and fast now. There's probably been a few 100 arrests already. They're really ramping them up. Margie Mansfield is in the crowd. Her husband, Richard, is protesting despite the prospect of six months in jail.

I think he's being brave. Everybody here is being...

It's part of you want to be like, all right, let's just put the sign away and maybe just go home and have dinner.

We have post genocide and that is the whole message and we think it's wrong that the government has prescribed his terrorist laws incorrectly.

One, two, three. I don't know how it's going to keep going. I mean, the resources, the manpower, the money this is all costing, it's difficult to see how this is going to end. By the end of the day, the total number of arrests made since the prescription of Palestine action has surpassed 2,000. And as if people weren't angry enough already, the government is about to introduce yet another controversial restriction on protest.

After a protest by supporters of Palestine action, Home Secretary gave police new powers to allow them to consider the cumulative impact of repeated protests.

Having already taken the step of banning a direct-action protest group, the U.K. government is now controversially starting to clamp down on repeated street protests, too. We're told discontent is growing among the civil service, and a senior civil servant in the Home Office has got in touch. They've asked to remain anonymous, so their words are spoken by an actor. So what's your role at the Home Office?

So I'm a senior civil servant in the Home Office. I can't really tell you what I do for a job without identifying myself. But I felt I had to speak out and say that I and many other people who work in the Home Office, including other senior civil servants, feel that this prescription is wrong.

How many people do you think feel this way?

I do hear a significant number of colleagues expressing disquiet.

What sorts of things are they saying?

They worry about the impact of freedom of speech. They worry about whether this is good, well-balanced decision-making.

There were also new restrictions on protests announced. Is that right?

That just seems to be part of the same attempt to curtail the right to freedom of speech.

So, where could these calls for tougher action on both Palestine Action and repeated pro-Palestine protests be coming from? I've managed to get hold of some documents that suggest that Elbit Systems was actually meeting with the Home Office about Palestine Action for years. So, this first document comes from a Freedom of Information request and dates back to 2022. It's a briefing note shared among Home Office colleagues ahead of a meeting with Elbit UK's chief executive. We've also found internal emails detailing other meetings with Elbit UK. This one is from 2023. It says

here, Reassure Elbit Systems UK and the wider sector affected by passing action that the government cares about the harm the group are causing the private sector. Lobbying isn't illegal. And in fact, restrictions on Palestine action and restrictions on repeat protests were recommended in one report by the government's former advisor on political violence, Lord Walney. He says he supports the right to protest, so I want to find out why he recommended these policies.

When you looked at the example of Palestine action, they had been running a criminal sabotage campaign for a number of years. I think most people look at that and think, That is madness. Why are we allowing this organization to exist?

Where do you draw the line? Because I think, you know, you're talking about direct action.

Criminal sabotage. Criminal sabotage. 'Cause I think it is not the benign thing that those on the far left who employ it would like you to think it is.

But your report also does mention, you know, regular pro-Palestine marches as well. Mm. As potentially being criminal.

What the consequence of these weekly Gaza marches, with this extremism within the margins of them, has been to make city centers feel like a highly intimidating place for many Jewish people. There's a host of ways. in this modern democracy in which you work, that you can get your point across. It does not have to be, like, every Saturday, you're taking over the town centre with this kind of atmosphere, which does feel highly intimidating to many people.

The organisers of the protest themselves may say that it does deserve a weekly protest, considering that, you know, it is one of the largest slaughters of civilians happening in the world today. And in your report, you also recommend that the organizers of such protests should be potentially held liable for the damages those protests cause. I mean, doesn't that kind of, in a way, affect our freedom of expression and freedom to protest generally?

The right to protest is not, as in all our rights in the UK, really. It is not an unqualified right in that it is there without any due regard to other people's rights.

And it does seem like the specific focus of yours has been the pro-Palestine marches.

Well, those are the marches that are happening.

What's your response to critics of yours who have pointed to the fact that you, you know, have had paid positions for the defense lobby as well and how that might affect your ability to be an independent advisor on these?

Well, I have looked at this issue systematically and independently and produced a very long and, I think, well-evidenced report.

And what about critics who pointed to the fact that you previously were a chair for Labour Friends of Israel and how that may affect your ability to independently advise on these protests?

The UK is a friend of Israel.

Is being a friend of Israel the right position to have, given the mass slaughter of civilians that has been going on in Gaza?

Well, your, what you say on that is highly contested.

Which part?

Obviously, Israel does not, and I don't think the UK government accepts your characterization of the, of the conflict. And I was brought in by the government to look specifically at our protest laws, and I've tried to do that in a dispassionate way.

Five months on from the banning of Palestine action, the High Court is about to consider whether that decision was lawful and proportionate. This will determine the fate of the thousands who have been arrested in connection with the ban, defining the boundary between protest and terrorism. But before they announce their decision, a jury delivers its verdict in the trial of my friend Eli Cameo. By the time I get to court, a large crowd has arrived to mark the end of the most serious Palestine action-related court case yet.

On the verge of aggravated burglary, all Sikh defendants were found not guilty.

Eli Cameo is found not guilty of one charge. Three of the activists are found not guilty of violent disorder. But on all remaining charges, including the charge of violent disorder against Ellie, the jury failed to reach a verdict.

The jury failed to convict my daughter Ellie and the other five, who took courageous action to stop the genocide. The past 18 months have been harrowing, and I now need to take her home to heal and rebuild our lives. She has lost everything, her home in London and her livelihood, but not her dignity.

For now, a group of Ellie's peers have not been able to agree whether her direct action protest was criminal. Following the verdict, the judge has granted Ellie and four of her co-defendants bail. Palestine Action supporters see it as a victory. But the verdict has sparked nationwide controversy, with politicians, Jewish groups, and leading police organizations all voicing concern. And now, the CPS is seeking a retrial.

Whoa, I'm in a car. I'm not handcuffed.

I'll kill you! After a year and a half in prison, This is the first interview with Ellie Cameo. How do you feel?

Uh, really overwhelmed.

Is this really surreal that I'm here interviewing you?

Yeah, sorry. Am I being too weird?

No, no, it's surreal for me, too. Okay. What's the one thing you're looking forward to doing now?

Being treated like a human being. Like, you don't get that in prison.

Like, were you expecting that you'd get this level of attention, that this would turn into this big of a story and that... powers and action would be designated as terrorists by the government.

No. Yeah, no, definitely not. It wasn't like I was naive, but it was like, there was like 400 other actions before ours. And to my knowledge, everything had been fine. But I also feel like... It was inevitably going to happen because it was building up and, like, the government doesn't like Palestine Action because it's embarrassing. It's embarrassing for so many people to get acquitted time and time again.

So, there's been a lot of press about Palestine Action since you've been inside, and some have pointed to the fact that members of Palestine Action have set things in support of October 7th, or hinted that there's this idea that... that Palestine Action is funded by Iran, or that it creates a climate of fear for Jewish people. What do you make about all those allegations?

Obviously, that is not true. Like, the reason why I did this was because I oppose, like, killing innocent lives.

Including, like, what happened on October 7th.

Yes, of course. Palestine Action was just about normal people who... don't agree that a company like Elbit should be making these horrific weapons and drones. We tried marching, we tried talking to our MPs, nobody did anything. So we were like, right, well, we'll just have to go and smash up these weapons ourselves then. That's why I did it, because I had no other option. And that's why everybody should care about this. It's not just about Palestine action and it being prescribed. It's about people having the right to protest.

Under UK law today, Damaging property to advance a political cause is enough for governments to place activists in the same legal category as mass casualty bombers. But that doesn't mean they have to. Were they reaching for the bluntest tool to contain dissent? And in doing so, have they deepened divisions rather than resolve them? For

some, the question is whether Palestine action are terrorists. But for others, it's whether our terrorism laws are too broad, especially given their impact on free speech.