PROSCRIBING PALESTINE ACTION

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out why Palestine Action should be considered a terrorist organisation, as described in the Terrorism Act 2000.

WHAT IS PALESTINE ACTION?

Palestine Action is a UK-based activist group which was formed in 2020. It has gained attention for what the organisation describes as "direct action" against companies and institutions which it considers to be linked to the Israeli Government, ranging from defence contractors to the BBC. The organisation is known for confrontational and criminal tactics, including damage to property, vandalism and the occupation of corporate or public facilities. Their most notable targets include Elbit Systems, an Israel-based defence contractor with subsidiary facilities throughout the United Kingdom.[1] Since the 7th October 2023 terrorist attacks by Hamas and the subsequent war between Hamas and Israel, Palestine Action has increasingly been targeting cultural and educational sites.

The group's methods often involve the destruction of property, disruption of business operations, and threats to public safety. Palestine Action revels in these activities and writes extensively about them on its website.[2] The organisation has also published a handbook named "The Underground Manual", which includes instructions on everything from forming "cells", to how to "pick a target", and how to commit criminal damage in the most harmful way.[3] The handbook includes instructions on what to wear, how to use a burner phone, and which tools to use to cause the greatest damage.

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[1] See https://www.elbitsystems-uk.com/about-us/vision-mission

[2] See https://palestineaction.org/news/

[3] See https://mcusercontent.com/90edceef8c5b3590f9019f500/files/3fb3b28a-3b42-5e35-cfd1-06ddebc155d1/Palestine_Action_Underground_Manual.pdf

EXAMPLES OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

- On 2nd November 2024, members of Palestine Action broke into buildings belonging to the University of Manchester. They caused damage to a display before stealing two busts, including one of Israel's first President, Chaim Weizmann.[4] Palestine Action subsequently shared posts on X, showing one of the sculptures with its head removed. The group declared in the caption of the post "First bust of Weizmann is dead. Soon, his zionist project will be too! [sic]"



- In June 2024, up to twenty branches of Barclays Bank were covered in red paint and their windows smashed. Palestine Action alleges that Barclays holds shares in Elbit Systems. The group accompanied these actions with the following statement: "Whilst the Gaza genocide rages on, our actions against the zionist war machine and those who fund it will continue to intensify. There is no more time to waste on begging institutions to end their complicity. Ultimately, banks reduce Palestinian lives to profit on their accounts. As finance is the only language they understand, we will ensure they understand the full cost of investing in Israel's weapons trade [sic]."[5]

- Other actions include destroying a painting at the University of Cambridge,[6] breaking into Elbit Systems facilities and causing tens of thousands of pounds worth of damage,[7] and attacking the offices of Jewish community charities.[8]

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[4] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c207z70g6xeo

[5] See https://palestineaction.org/leeds-banks/

[6] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-68515368

[7] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clygv1p3867o

[8] See https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-827281

TERRORISM ACT 2000

WHAT IS A TERRORIST ORGANISATION?

Section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2000 (the "Terrorism Act") defines acts of terrorism as actions or threats involving:

- Serious violence against a person;
- Serious damage to property;
- Endangering a person's life, other than that of the person committing the action;
- Creating a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public; or
- Action designed to seriously interfere with or seriously disrupt an electronic system.[9]

In order to satisfy the definition, the use or threat of the above must be to influence the Government (including international governments) or to intimidate the public. Further, under section 1(1)(c) of the Terrorism Act, the use or threat of action must be made "for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause."[10]

The Terrorism Act grants powers to the Home Secretary to proscribe an organisation. Section 3(5) provides that "an organisation is concerned in terrorism if it commits or participates in acts of terrorism; prepares for terrorism promotes or encourages terrorism; or is otherwise concerned in terrorism."[11]

[9] See https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/section/1

[10] See https://www.cps.gov.uk/crime-info/terrorism

[11] See https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/section/3

ANALYSIS

DAMAGE TO PROPERTY

Palestine Action's "Underground Manual" states: "Dream up crazy ideas in your cell, remember that your action is to destrupt [sic], damage or destroy your target."[12] It explains tactics and actions which would maximise the damage inflicted on property. The manual goes on to describe the effectiveness of using sledgehammers. The group even described in its handbook how sewage and water pipes can be blocked with concrete.



There are dozens of instances where Palestine Action has orchestrated red paint being thrown or sprayed onto buildings or property, for example, red paint thrown onto Senate House, Cambridge.[13] Other examples include using repurposed fire extinguishers to spray red paint on a building on The Strand, London (see photograph),[14] and spraying red paint on the Ministry of Defence.[15] These actions are intended to cause thousands of pounds worth of damage.

Several members of Palestine Action have been arrested for serious offences linked to their criminal actions. Offences include criminal damage, aggravated burglary and violent disorder.[16] In some instances, the cost of damage caused by group members has exceeded £1 million.[17]

The group has celebrated and widely publicised these actions.

SERIOUS RISK TO THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE PUBLIC

The activity undertaken by Palestine Action is intended to intimidate and cause serious risks to the health and safety of the public, an example being when members used a van

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[12] See https://mcusercontent.com/90edceef8c5b3590f9019f500/files/3fb3b28a-3b42-5e35-cfd1-06ddebc155d1/Palestine_Action_Underground_Manual.pdf

[13] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4nn1p30dxzo

[14] See https://palestineaction.org/apco-lobby/

[15] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68781130

[16] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clygv1p3867o

[17] See https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/palestine-action-protest-israel-elbit-old-bailey-b1198510.html

to ram through the gates of a factory.[18] The group regularly causes considerable damage to facilities accessible to members of the public, an example being the attacks against Barclays Bank. Palestine Action targeted several branches of Barclays Bank nationwide, including those on busy high streets, smashing windows and spraying paint. [19] This caused a risk to the safety of both Barclays employees and the wider public.

Aside from endangering ordinary members of the public, the group's actions also pose a risk of injury and harm to emergency services. There have been multiple instances of police officers having to climb onto roofs or other dangerous locations to remove Palestine Action members.[20] One instance involved officers employing a JCB digger to allow them to remove protestors. [21]

INTIMIDATION OF THE PUBLIC

Palestine Action consistently states and conveys through its activities, social media presence, and website, that its goal is to pressure businesses into aligning with its ideological objectives. The group publicly celebrates its so-called "victories" by documenting the disruptions that it has caused to business operations.

One such example involves the alleged headquarters of Elbit Systems in London. Palestine Action targeted the site by forcibly entering the premises, harassing individuals present and vandalising the building with red paint.[22] The group also directed its actions toward a business it accused of leasing the property, damaging their premises and issuing demands to "evict Elbit."

On social media, the group frequently issues threats. Following an incident of criminal damage at Edwards Accountants in Birmingham, Palestine Action posted images online with captions such as, "Don't want us to turn up? Drop Elbit now."[23] A recurring theme in the group's campaigns is pressuring companies to sever ties with Elbit Systems or other businesses linked to Israel.

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[18] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce8108jyldmo

[19] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1rrzp1qwp1o

[20] See https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/riot-officers-deployed-police-remove-5452985

[21] See https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/police-use-digger-remove-palestine-action-activist-weapons-company-building

[22] See https://palestineaction.org/london-hq-shut/

[23] See https://x.com/Pal_action/status/1922631906840990209

Another notable incident occurred in Milton Keynes, where Palestine Action activists vandalised a factory that they mistakenly believed was producing machines used in the manufacture of weapons for the Israeli military. The company, however, strongly denied any links to the arms trade, calling the activists "misinformed" and condemning the damage to their premises. This case underscores the group's tendency to act on flawed information, with significant consequences for uninvolved businesses.[24]



These incidents show how Palestine Action uses intimidation—through vandalism, threats, and misinformation—to pressure businesses and alarm the public. Their aggressive tactics are designed not only to disrupt but to create fear and deter any association with targeted companies.

POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CAUSE

On the "About us" section of Palestine Action's website, the group states that: "Palestine Action is a direct action movement committed to ending global participation in Israel's genocidal and apartheid regime. Using disruptive tactics, Palestine Action targets corporate enablers of the Israeli military-industrial complex and seeks to make it impossible for these companies to profit from the oppression of Palestinians."[25]

The group makes clear that its goal is to use confrontational tactics to pressure organisations and businesses to cut ties with Israel. Although the organisation states that it targets Israel's military-industrial complex, targets are often selected which have little to no connection to Israel, for example, the destruction of an irreplaceable painting of Lord Balfour.[26] On its website, Palestine Action appears to justify the criminal activity due to Lord Balfour's famous declaration, which eventually led to the creation of the state of Israel.[27] The group regularly makes comments on social media decrying the founding of the State of Israel.

Whilst committing acts of criminal damage against buildings and facilities, the group will regularly make demands from their victims. These demands link to their political and

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[24] See https://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/people/misinformed-activists-smash-up-milton-keynes-factory-wrongly-claiming-its-machines-are-used-to-make-weapons-for-the-israeli-military-4706113

[25] See https://palestineaction.org/about/

[26] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-68515368

[27] See https://palestineaction.org/lord-balfour-painting/

ideological cause of undermining Israeli defence contractors' abilities to operate in the UK, with the ultimate goal of the dismantlement of the State of Israel, which they express as a call for the “Zionist project” to die.[28] A regular feature of the group actions includes vandalising buildings with the phrase "Drop Elbit”.

The group states on its website that its strategy is to take “direct action” to achieve its ideological goals. The group highlights that it does not wish to rely on governments to achieve its goals; rather, in the group’s own words, “It means imagining the future we want and bringing it to the present, for example, if we want to see Elbit shut down, we shut Elbit down.” This "direct action” is broken into five ideals: “Disruption", “Sustained”, “Dilemma”, “Focus” and “Sacrifice”, with the latter calling for members to “sacrifice” themselves to achieve the group’s goals.

[28] See https://x.com/Pal_action/status/1853850412882784540

CONCLUSION

Palestine Action uses violent, confrontational and criminal tactics driven by a political and ideological cause. This is not incidental to their method: it is their method. The group regularly takes action that causes significant amounts of damage to property and serious risk to the health and safety of the public. Many of Palestine Action's activities include making demands backed by intimidation and criminality, such as the campaign to "Drop Elbit", with the implication that criminal actions will continue until the victim complies with the group's demands. This includes the targeting of businesses and organisations with tenuous ties to Israel or Israel-linked defence contractors.

The group has a detailed "manual" that explains how best to conduct criminal activity. It assists in planning and preparing for the acts, even providing guidance on how to conceal members' identities. The manual encourages methods and tactics to maximise disruption and damage to property.

Campaign Against Antisemitism considers that Palestine Action commits acts of terrorism within section 1 of the Terrorism Act and is therefore concerned with acts of terrorism, as set out in section 3 of the Terrorism Act.

For these reasons, we call on the Home Secretary to proscribe Palestine Action.