

British government declares Hamas political wing a terrorist organisation

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Priti Patel, Britain's Home Secretary, used her visit to Washington last week to announce plans to proscribe the political wing of Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated group that rules Gaza, as a terrorist organisation.

She aims to push the ban through parliament next week, her third such order in the last year. Hamas' military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, was outlawed in 2001.

Under the UK's Terrorism Act 2000, such a ban means Hamas' assets can be seized and its members jailed. Any expression of support for the organisation, be it fund-raising, flying its flag or logo, wearing clothes with its image, or holding a meeting for the organisation, would be in breach of the law, with supporters facing prison sentences of up to 10 years and/or a fine. Hamas would be joining 78 groups already outlawed under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

On November 12, Feras Al Jayoosi, 34, appeared in a British court to plead guilty to the charge of wearing T-shirts supporting Hamas's military wing and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which the UK banned in 2001 and 2005. He wore the clothing in the Golders Green area of north London, home to a large Jewish population, on three occasions in June.

Patel tweeted Friday, 'Hamas has significant terrorist capability, including access to extensive and sophisticated weaponry, as well as terrorist training facilities. That is why today I have acted to proscribe Hamas in its entirety.' She claimed it was impossible to distinguish between Hamas' political and military wings.

Founded in 1988 shortly after the outbreak of the first Intifada in the occupied Palestinian territories, Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, aims to establish an Islamic state in Palestine. Winning support from Palestinians disillusioned with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas's subservience to Israel, rampant corruption, nepotism and economic mismanagement, Hamas received the most votes in the 2006 elections, the last the PA has held. In June 2007, Israel, with the support of the PA and later Egypt, imposed a land, sea and air blockade on Gaza that has continued to this day, after Hamas forces defeated an attempted coup in Gaza by Abbas' Fatah movement.

In the last 14 years, Israel, the strongest military power in the Middle East, has killed thousands of Palestinians in its savage wars of 2008-09, 2012, 2014 and 2021 on Gaza's essentially defenceless 2 million population in retaliation for the launching of amateurish rockets, balloons and incendiary devices that rarely cause any significant damage, let alone injure or kill anyone.

Benny Gantz, Israel's Defence Minister and former military chief of staff, faces the possibility of prosecution by the International Criminal Court for war crimes committed by Israel during its 2014 military assault that killed more than 2,100 people, mainly civilians. On the Israeli side, 67 soldiers and five civilians were killed.

Patel ignored Israel's reign of terror over the Palestinians and failed to provide any evidence of Hamas' terrorist activities in Britain or elsewhere to support the ban, claiming, "It's based upon a wide range of intelligence, information and also links to terrorism. The severity of that speaks for itself."

She added that Hamas is "fundamentally and rabidly anti-Semitic", arguing that the ban was necessary to protect Britain's Jewish community. The implications of the ban were made clear when the *Daily Mail* gloated, "Jeremy Corbyn [the former Labour Party leader] faces TEN YEARS in jail if he meets his 'friends' from Hamas again under new measures to treat supporters of the Palestinian group as terrorists."

In 2009, Corbyn, who has been stripped of his membership of the Parliamentary Labour Party and now sits as an independent MP, described Hamas as "friends" in 2009 during an appeal for dialogue, stating after being attacked that he regretted using the term.

Patel is a former vice-chairperson of Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI). In 2017, she was forced to resign her position as Department for International Development (DFID) Secretary after reports she had held 12 meetings with top Israeli officials, including the then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other political leaders, arranged by the former head of the CFI, while on a 12-day "family

holiday” to Israel. On her return, Patel lobbied to use part of DFID’s aid budget for Israeli army field hospitals treating Al Nusra Front and other Al Qaeda-linked forces fighting the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Her attempt to launder money to groups with proven links to terrorist activity exposed the duplicity of Britain’s “war on terror” and Israel’s role in providing the imperialist powers with deniability for their dirty work in the Middle East.

Patel’s announcement was hailed by Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett predictably declaring Hamas is “a radical Islamic group that targets innocent Israelis and seeks Israel’s destruction.” Notorious for his hardline response to the Palestinians, he has boasted of killing “lots of Arabs” and criticised previous governments for failing to respond to Gaza’s incendiary balloons.

Israel’s Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said the move was a result of “joint efforts” between the British and Israeli governments. It follows reports in the Israel press that Bennett had asked Prime Minister Boris Johnson to proscribe the group when he met with him at the UN COP26 climate conference in Glasgow to discuss relations between the two countries and the Iran nuclear negotiations in Vienna.

Patel’s announcement followed a meeting with US Secretary of State for Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas that, according to the *Daily Mail*, included an agreement to embed more British spies in US agencies, and vice versa.

On Sunday, Israel’s President Isaac Herzog began a three-day visit to Britain, where he is to meet Johnson, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, Prince Charles, Jewish community leaders and members of parliament. Top of his agenda is Israel’s opposition to any renewal of the nuclear accord with Iran.

Patel’s move against Hamas must also be seen within the context of Britain’s domestic politics. Patel and other right-wing politicians are using the mantra of “combating anti-Semitism” to push through policies targeting the right to protest and freedom of expression on university campuses, and ultimately the subject matter of research itself. This is bound up with efforts to militarise the campuses and turn them into centres for government propaganda and adjuncts of Britain’s war machine, directed against widespread anti-war sentiment among students and youth.

In September, the University of Bristol set a filthy precedent by sacking David Miller, a professor of political sociology, for his support for the Palestinians, based on allegations that his criticisms of US militarism and Israel’s oppression of the Palestinian people were “offensive”. This followed a two-year campaign for his dismissal by pro-Zionist lobby groups and MPs. Miller was sacked despite the

university admitting that his alleged remarks were not unlawful,

Last week, a protest organized by student Palestine solidarity activists at a talk given at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) by Tzipi Hotovely, Israel’s far-right ambassador to the UK, provoked a furious backlash from Israel’s supporters. Hotovely’s record as a rabid nationalist and racist politician includes: advocating bringing the occupied West Bank under permanent Israeli control without giving citizenship to Palestinians who live there; inviting a racist and violent anti-miscegenation group into the Knesset, stating that it was ‘important to examine procedures for preventing mixed marriages’; and calling the expulsion and flight of 750,000 Palestinians from their homes before and during the 1948-49 Arab-Israeli war “an Arab lie” during an event organized by the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

The Jewish Chronicle denounced the protest as a “Jew hunting mob on the streets of London,” drawing parallels with Kristallnacht, on whose anniversary the protest took place. Conservative and Labour politicians branded the protest as anti-Semitic, calling for harsh measures including a police investigation into those taking part.

This comes weeks after the House of Commons approved a second reading of the Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill, which introduces severe restrictions on the right to protest. The UK government also intends to introduce a Boycott Bill in early 2022 banning public institutions, such as local authorities or universities, from implementing boycotts of products from other countries for political reasons. It targets the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) campaign aimed at pressuring Israel to withdraw from the Occupied Territories, remove the Separation Wall in the West Bank, provide full equality to Israel’s Palestinian citizens and respect the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties.



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