

Pro-Israel lobby groups in Britain use “lawfare” to silence solidarity with Palestine

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A detailed report has highlighted the anti-democratic impact of pro-Israel lobby groups and their use of “lawfare” in Britain to suppress opposition to the Gaza genocide and slander opposition to the mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians as antisemitism.

Britain’s Apartheid Apologists was published by CAGE, an NGO set up in 2003 to raise awareness of the plight of detainees held at Guantánamo Bay. CAGE campaigns against torture, imprisonment without trial, anti-terror laws and similar injustices.

The report explains that the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in its landmark July 2024 ruling, declared Israel’s decades-long occupation of Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, unlawful and in breach of international law. Furthermore, the policies underpinning Israel’s illegal occupation amount to racial segregation and apartheid under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The ICJ insisted that all United Nations member states must neither recognise nor aid the maintenance of such a regime.

The ICJ placed a direct obligation on the UK and other governments to ensure that its institutions, including charitable and regulatory bodies, do not support or legitimise Israel’s system of racial domination.

Dr. Asim Qureshi, CAGE International’s Research Director, explains in launching the report, “Britain faces a democratic emergency, with free expression under sustained attack from a network of bad-faith actors who collaborate with willing and racist government institutions to suppress popular opposition to Zionism and support for the Palestinian people”. He added, “What begins with the silencing of Palestine advocacy today, could be turned against any contentious issue in future”.

The report’s foreword, written by the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN), states, “The CAA and UKLFI’s work has contributed to an intensifying wave of repression: wearing a pin or keffiyeh for Palestine becomes a sackable offence; speaking out against the Gaza genocide risks referrals to regulators; and tearing down factories

arming genocide results in lengthy custodial sentences”.

IJAN added that anti-discrimination law in the UK is being misused as the “central tool for suppressing anti-Zionism or pro-Palestinian advocacy and action... Specifically, proponents of Zionism wilfully and recklessly perpetuate a basic falsehood: that support for Palestine is antisemitism. In doing so they use the very laws meant to prevent racism to advance it”.

The CAGE report documents how UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI) and the Campaign Against Antisemitism (CAA), both registered as UK charities, have used Britain’s laws, regulations and institutions to protect Israel’s apartheid regime while targeting those who criticise Zionism and Israel’s racist policies. The UKLFI and CAA have brought a raft of lawsuits to stifle free speech, chill public debate and intimidate Palestinian solidarity activists. Those targeted include, among others, academics, doctors, students and charity organisations.

Set up in 2010 by lawyers who had participated in a “conference on lawfare” held in the far-right settlement, Ma’ale Adumim, near Jerusalem, the UKLFI is explicit in its support for Israel and opposition to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and others. Much of its work is carried out through its lawyer networks and patrons embedded in wider Zionist networks such as the Jewish National Fund, lobby groups such as the Conservative and Labour Friends of Israel, as well as the Henry Jackson Society and AIPAC, the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC), the Community Security Trust, Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM).

The CAA was set up after the 2014 war on Gaza, as a challenger to the more establishment Board of Deputies of British Jews, which had faced criticism for not being forceful enough in support of Israel. While the CAA’s ostensible purpose is to highlight acts of antisemitism in the UK, much of its activities are geared towards reporting on those who criticise or oppose Israel.

The aim of both organisations, by conflating criticism of Israel and anti-Zionism with antisemitism, using the

discredited International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism and its illustrative examples, is to inhibit and disrupt criticism of Israeli crimes. Both organisations have close ties with the Blairite right-wing of the Labour Party, Zionists and Conservatives, all with intimate connections to the security services of Britain, the US and Israel. Both refuse to disclose their funding sources and backers.

The UKLFI has targeted professional regulators, such as the General Medical Council, Solicitors' Regulation Authority, Bar Standards Board and the Charity Commission, bombarding them with vexatious complaints aimed at harassing and silencing Palestinian rights advocates and using the same tactics as those set out by the Israeli government for combating the BDS movement. It refuses to accept international law that deems Israel's occupation of West Bank illegal and refers to it as "Judea and Samaria".

UKLFI has driven the campaign to get universities and public authorities to adopt the IHRA definition and counter BDS activism, sending threatening letters to student union trustee boards and/or university management alleging that policy passed is either ultra vires/unlawful, a breach of charitable objectives, or discriminatory. Since 2016, its actions have been responsible for overturning or nullifying BDS policy passed in dozens of campuses. It has reported other charities to the Charity Commission including Medical Aid for Palestine, War on Want, and Education Aid for Palestine, for links to terrorism. None of their complaints have been upheld.

UKLFI went to great lengths to minimise and smear efforts to stop the genocide, including by obscuring and confusing the International Court of Justice's January 2024 ruling that it was plausible that Israel's ongoing attacks on Gaza are in breach of the Genocide Convention. It sought to minimise the death toll, defend the conduct of Israel's military, deny the man-made famine in Gaza, accuse the International Criminal Court (ICC) of lying and even threatened legal action against the Starmer Labour government over its token and partial arms export licenses suspension to Israel.

The UKLFI's denial that Israel is implementing a starvation policy in Gaza reached its lowest point when its chief executive, Jonathan Turner, arguing that the war may have unintended health benefits by reducing obesity in the enclave.

The CAA has likewise bombarded universities, local councils and public bodies with complaints, creating—according to the CAGE report—a climate of fear in British public life and academia to the point that academics self-censor Palestine-related work to avoid being smeared as antisemitic. Along with UKLFI, it played a prominent role in

the witch-hunting of National Union of Students (NUS) President Shaima Dallali and University of Bristol Professor David Miller.

Others targeted include: Dr. Ray Campbell, a lecturer in theatre at Goldsmiths University in London; the Palestinian singer and rapper Saint Levant (Marwan Abdelhamid); Palestine Action for its demonstrations against Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems; the telecoms regulator Ofcom after a contestant on the ITV show *Big Brother* was viewed wearing a watermelon motif t-shirt prompting the programme to airbrush it out in later viewings; and the Irish hip-hop group Kneecap, urging festivals to remove them from their line-ups, leading to the cancellation of Kneecap's performances at the Eden Sessions and Plymouth Pavilions and prompting a charge under the Terrorism Act for displaying a Hezbollah flag, a proscribed organisation.

The CAA demanded that University College London Student Centre respond to its complaint about students chanting "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," and complained to the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) that students supporting Palestine at the SOAS campus had a slogan on a banner that read, "Stop genocide baby killer Israel" that refers to the large number of children killed in Gaza recapitulated the blood libel claim against Jews.

The organisation played a leading role in the ferocious right-wing campaign against Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters when he became leader of the Labour Party in 2015, claiming that he and his supporters had transformed the party into an anti-Semitic threat to British Jews, who would be forced to flee the UK if he became prime minister. This paved the way for the Blairite faction under Sir Keir Starmer to take control of the party, ensuring that it remained a reliable instrument of the most reactionary elements within the British state apparatus.

The broader aim of the UKLFI, CAA and its network of pro-Israel lobby groups working closely with the British establishment is to legitimise the criminal policies of British and US imperialism in the Middle East that use Israel as their proxies against the Palestinians and Iran and its allies in Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. The essential target of this "antisemitic" vilification is the working class that faces censorship, political victimisation and prosecutions for opposing imperialism's crimes at home and abroad.



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