

Mass arrests escalate in UK following proscription of Palestine Action

Martin Smith
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The Starmer government's repression of opposition to Israel's genocide in Gaza was stepped up this weekend, with police arresting more than 100 people at protests around the UK for expressing support for the direct action protest group Palestine Action.

Palestine Action was proscribed on July 5, making membership of or support for the group a criminal offence, punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

People demonstrating against proscription were arrested under Section 13 of the Terrorism Act 2000 in London, Cardiff, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Glasgow. Police mostly targeted protesters holding signs reading, "I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action."

Sixty-six people were arrested in London, mainly on small protests against the criminalisation of PalAction. Posting an "arrest update" on X the Metropolitan Police said on Saturday afternoon, "55 people were arrested in Parliament Square for displaying placards in support of Palestine Action which is a proscribed group. They were arrested under Sec 13 of the Terrorism Act 2000." Another 4pm posting stated that "a further 10 ten people have been arrested within the main Palestine Coalition march," including "Eight for supporting a proscribed organisation (Palestine Action)" and "One for breaching Public Order Act conditions."

The arrests mean that around 300 people have now been arrested under sections of the Terrorism Act since PalAction was proscribed, compared to 248 people arrested on terrorism charges in the UK during the whole of last year.

Saturday saw the 28th national demonstration held in the capital against the Gaza genocide. Around 80,000 people attended the Palestine Coalition march and rally, braving a thunderstorm to do so. Two days before the

protest the Met put out a statement designed to cow those planning to attend under the heading, "UPDATE: Met reiterates warning on support for proscribed organisations ahead of Saturday protests".

It stated "There will be an increased police presence in Westminster on Saturday when a number of protests are due to take place."

Declaring that Public Order Act conditions would be in place it continued, "We are also expecting further protest activity in support of Palestine Action which is a group now proscribed under the Terrorism Act. Similar protests have taken place in Parliament Square for the past two weekends, with 70 arrests made."

On the day, most police were deployed against the PalAction solidarity protest. The BBC reported of the London arrests that "many... appeared to be over the age of 60. One woman claimed to be in her 80s and was walking with a stick. Some were led away while others had to be carried."

In Bristol, Avon and Somerset Police arrested 17 people under the Terrorism Act after a demonstration on College Green. In Manchester 16 were arrested. In Truro, Cornwall, eight were arrested, including an 81 year old retired magistrate, Deborah Hinton.

During the London demonstration, the Met deployed signage to further intimidate reading in block capitals, "Threatening or abusive chants may lead to arrest" and "It is an offence to support a proscribed organisation".

At least 56 Palestine Action members are presently being tried for offences related to their peaceful protests at arms factories and military installations, such as criminal damage and trespass. At least 13 members have been arrested since June 20. In many of their cases, the prosecution has already claimed a "terrorist connection".

On Sunday, prominent Liverpool left-wing activist

Audrey White was one of four people arrested under the Terrorism Act for carrying signs supporting Palestine Action. White rose to national prominence in 2022 when she confronted Starmer in a restaurant and denounced his right-wing policies. The 76 year-old head of the Mersey Pensioners Association was subjected to a brutal arrest by a least four police officers as they dragged her away—to chants of “shame on you!”—before they bundled her into a waiting police van.

Independent news web site Skwawkbox reported, “White’s brother Mark Holt, who was on the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza in 2008 and drove across Europe and into Gaza with Medical Aid, a young woman, and a retired housing adviser are believed to be the others arrested.”

On Monday, three women appeared in court after being arrested on July 15 after a van was driven into the fence of a factory owned by arms manufacturer, Leonardo in Edinburgh. After being charged under section 57 of the Terrorism Act 2000 on Sunday, they appeared at Edinburgh Sheriff Court the next day. Section 57 of the Terrorism Act 2000 makes it an offence for a person to possess an article in circumstances where there’s a reasonable suspicion that the possession is connected to the commission, preparation, or instigation of an act of terrorism. A conviction under section 57 can include imprisonment for up to 15 years, a fine, or both.

The Starmer government’s targeting of prominent political activists has seen a slew of journalists detained and arrested under terrorism charges. On July 16, one of those targeted, Kit Klarenberg, reported, “Appalled but depressingly unsurprised to learn my friend @SweeneySteve [Steve Sweeney, Beirut-based war correspondent who is the head of RT’s Lebanon bureau] got detained, interrogated and his digital devices seized by British terror gestapo thugs coming home.”

RT reported, “In a statement posted Wednesday on her Telegram channel, [RT editor-in-chief Margarita] Simonyan said Sweeney was apprehended on arrival in Britain and interrogated at length about his work for RT. According to Simonyan, officers told Sweeney he was ‘suspected of terrorist activities,’ confiscated his phones and laptop, and questioned him about editorial practices at the network.” Simonyan said that “police

asked Sweeney whether he had any links to Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite militant group and took photos of his tattoos. She added that after the interrogation, Sweeney was released and ‘plans to continue working for RT’”.

On Sunday, the *Guardian* reported, “Greater Manchester Friends for Palestine (GMFP) and Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), which both organise peaceful protests and vigils, have had access to their funds cut off indefinitely by Virgin Money and Unity Trust bank respectively. The *Guardian* understands a local PSC branch in England has also had its bank account frozen but was unable to confirm it directly.”

This follows the same attack on prominent anti-Zionist Tony Greenstein, who was also charged last year under the Terrorism Act 2000. Skwawkbox reported July 12, “Greenstein first had his account with HSBC subsidiary First Direct, with whom he has banked for more than thirty years, frozen in March without explanation, then un-frozen a couple of weeks later, equally without explanation. On Thursday, he then received an ‘urgent’ email telling him to sign in to his online banking and found a message telling him that – supposedly because of a ‘periodic review’, the bank had decided it would no longer offer him banking facilities”.

While police forces were carrying out mass arrests, the Labour government was hosting the head of the Israeli air force, Major General Tomer Bar—who has overseen the destruction of Gaza from the air with weapons supplied by NATO powers, including Britain, which also provides critical reconnaissance assistance.

Bar’s main reason to be in Britain was to attend a conference hosted by the Royal Air Force, where he is to discuss with his counterparts among the major imperialist powers. *Middle East Eye* reported, “According to Israeli public broadcaster Kan, Bar will have a series of meetings with air force commanders from around the world.”



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