

Peter Osborne's *Complicit: Britain's role in the destruction of Gaza*

A passionate critique bereft of explanation or remedy

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Peter Osborne's *Complicit: Britain's role in the destruction of Gaza*, published by OR Books, lambasts Britain's two main political parties for the "cross-party cartel" through which they "established the political foundation that would make Britain complicit" in genocide and war crimes.

Osborne cites their military, political and diplomatic support for the massacres, indiscriminate bombing, torture and mass displacement of the Palestinians carried out by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) on the orders of the fascist government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Support for Israel also had backing from Nigel Farage's far-right Reform UK as well as the fascist activist Tommy Robinson.

Osborne says that Britain bears "heavy responsibility for the deaths in Gaza, third in line only behind Israel and its primary patron and collaborator the United States."

That *Complicit* has become a *Sunday Times* Bestseller testifies to the widespread opposition within Britain to the support for Israel's ongoing genocidal war against the Palestinians in Gaza by both the former Conservative government of Rishi Sunak and now Keir Starmer's Labour government.

Its success is all the more noteworthy because the mainstream press, including the *Guardian*, has not reviewed it. Yet the book's author is a journalist who used to write for the right-wing press, including the *Daily Telegraph*, where he was the paper's chief political commentator until he resigned in 2015, as well as the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Spectator*. He now writes for the *Byline Times*, *Declassified UK*, *Double Down News*, *Middle East Eye* and *openDemocracy*.

His previous books include *The Rise of Political Lying* (2005), *The Triumph of the Political Class* (2007), and *The Assault on Truth: Boris Johnson, Donald Trump and the Emergence of a New Moral Barbarism* (2021).

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) made a preliminary ruling on January 26, 2024, that Israel may "plausibly" be committing genocide in Gaza in the case brought by South Africa against Israel under the Genocide Convention.

Osborne explains that the ruling had serious legal, political, and moral implications for the UK government. It heightened

the UK's obligations under the Genocide Convention, which Britain had incorporated into domestic law under the 2001 International Criminal Court Act.

Under section 52 of the Act, it is an offence to engage in "conduct ancillary to genocide," thereby exposing the government and its ministers to potential legal challenges over its arms sales to and diplomatic support for Israel. Osborne argues that following the ICJ ruling, the then Conservative government should have terminated its support for Israel's war against the Palestinians. The British government should have deployed sanctions against Israel and "held Israel's leaders personally responsible for their atrocities." It could have sent the Royal Navy to break the blockade and called for a no-fly zone over Gaza.

Osborne outlines how first the Tory and then the Labour government gave their unconditional backing to the crushing of Palestinian resistance to Israel—following decades of support for Israel against the Palestinians—using the October 7 attack to justify the genocide. Speaking in October 2023, Starmer, a former human rights lawyer, even agreed with Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant that Israel had the right to cut off power and water, only retracting his statement a week later after it sparked an outcry and the resignations of several councillors.

The UK provided constant political and diplomatic support for Israel, opposing ceasefire resolutions at the UN Security Council. The Tory government sent warships to the Middle East as Israel began its onslaught. Since then, both governments have nodded through the export of arms to Israel in the full knowledge they would be used against the Palestinians. They supplied Israel with the necessary components for the F-35 fighter jets that it used to kill civilians, while the Royal Air Force flew near daily reconnaissance flights from its base in Cyprus to supply Israel with intelligence. The Conservative government never put Britain's support for Israel to a vote in parliament, and Labour in opposition did not call for such a vote.

The day after the ICJ ruling, the UK government withdrew funding for UNRWA, the agency that has for decades provided essential services for the Palestinians who were forced to flee

their homes due to ethnic cleansing during the 1948 and 1967 Arab Israeli wars, and Israel had long detested. Israel had alleged, with negligible evidence, that a handful of UNRWA's 13,000 employees had taken part in the October 7 assault. In so doing, the government was aiding Israel in its mission to annihilate the Palestinians.

Instead of challenging this cartel, the mainstream media backed it to the hilt. It repeated without query or criticism the assertions and statements put out by Israel about the October 7 attack, including its allegations of butchered and beheaded babies. Dissident voices were suppressed or sidelined. The truth about the war was suppressed, the facts misrepresented.

Both Conservative and Labour governments accused critics of the war of antisemitism and supporting terrorism. They blocked protests and arrested peaceful demonstrators, with the Labour government banning the nonviolent direct-action group Palestine Action as a "terrorist organisation" under the 2000 Terrorism Act.

Oborne examines the pro-Israel lobby in Britain, reserving particular ire for the Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI). He argues that it has become the most consequential of Britain's pro-Israel advocacy groups and played a significant role in marginalising Tory support for Palestine—the Arabist wing of the Tory party to which he belongs—in recent years.

He also examines the pro-Israel lobby in the Labour Party, although he downplays its role in undermining and removing Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party leadership—as well as its significance in replacing him with the right-wing pro-Zionist Starmer and suppressing all dissent within the Labour Party.

While Oborne offers a biting and passionate critique of the UK's support for Israel and complicity in its genocidal war against the Palestinians in Gaza, his disgust and moral outrage is no substitute for explaining its causes. He says that Britain's foreign policy in the Middle East—Conservative or Labour—flows from its support for "Atlanticism" but does not explain either the policy or the reasons for it.

Britain has long tied itself to US imperialism's coattails as a means of punching above its very reduced weight on the international arena and obtaining a share in the spoils that flowed from US control over markets and resources. It joined NATO and participated in Washington-directed wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, as well as backing Ukraine against Russia.

In June 2023, the US and UK announced the "Atlantic Declaration for a Twenty-First Century U.S.-UK Economic Partnership." This makes clear that cooperation between the US and Britain is based on confronting Russia and China. It states, "We face new challenges to international stability from authoritarian states such as Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC)."

Furthermore, "Over the past year, we have taken steps to deepen our unrivalled defence, security, and intelligence relationship across every theatre in the globe in which we

cooperate, recognizing the indivisibility of security in the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific and other regions."

Washington and London's backing for Israel in its wars, not just against the Palestinians, but against Iran and its allies in Lebanon and Yemen, as well as its efforts to weaken Syria and sever Damascus' relations with Moscow and Tehran, is bound up with reordering the energy-rich Middle East under the domination of US imperialism. This includes isolating Iran—or securing a change in regime in Tehran, to one that would pledge allegiance to Washington—in preparation for war against China. Israel's wars in Gaza and the Middle East—ongoing despite supposed ceasefires—form another front in an emerging World War.

London, no less than Washington, Berlin, Paris and Tokyo, is vastly expanding its armaments spend as it seeks to advance its predatory economic and geostrategic interests by military means throughout the world.

Oborne accuses Britain of conducting its foreign policy in "a closed world" by a small elite and "on behalf of opaque interests." He continues plaintively that what is needed is "legal accountability" that in turn requires "bringing democracy to Britain's state and society." He does not explain how such a change is to be achieved because he is an unalloyed defender of British imperialism and of capitalism.

The international working class is the only social force capable of halting the ruling elites' turn to imperialist wars of plunder and dictatorship to secure their own hegemony. It is the working class that creates all the wealth in society, a wealth that the oligarchy seizes for itself.

The working class is embarked upon major class battles, as shown by the rising opposition to US President Donald Trump exemplified by the massive "No Kings" protests and an upsurge in strikes across Europe and North America. The global mass protests against the Gaza genocide express the bitter hostility of millions to the barbarism of the Zionist regime and its imperialist patrons. They are taking place in countries that are political and social powder kegs.

The decisive task is to arm workers in struggle with the necessary socialist and internationalist programme to oppose militarism and war and the capitalist profit system that is their root cause.



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