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Palestine Action –
Strategic Briefing



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FORUM FOR
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LEEDS leads AGAINST ANTISEMITISM



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Foreword

Britain draws a clear line between protest and sabotage. On one side stand marches, petitions, and fierce argument—often inconvenient, sometimes infuriating, and rightly protected. On the other side stand organised operations against critical assets—break-ins at restricted sites, plant contamination, the disabling of aircraft—tactics designed to coerce government by degrading capability. Cross that line and you are no longer exercising a liberty; you are attacking the conditions that make liberty possible. This briefing is written to remove any lingering ambiguity. It is not about a cause; it is about a method. The law is content-neutral. It does not weigh the politics of a banner; it weighs what is done in its name. By the standard Parliament has set—serious, ideologically motivated damage directed at infrastructure to influence policy—Palestine Action’s record meets the test for proscription. The escalation to safety-critical sabotage, culminating in the grounding of RAF aircraft, confirms that this is not theatrical dissent but a campaign to incapacitate defence capability.

Proscription does not criminalise Palestine advocacy, nor does it mute robust criticism of government. It targets membership, material support, and logistics for a network that treats wrecking as a tactic. That distinction—protest protected, coercion proscribed—preserves civic space. It spares peaceful demonstrators from the contagion of escalating “direct action,” and it reassures workers and neighbours that their safety is not collateral to anyone’s politics. It also equips police, prosecutors, universities, councils and venues with a bright line they can explain and defend.

There is a larger principle at stake. A society that cannot defend its power stations, ports, data centres or aircraft cannot defend the freedoms conducted beneath their hum. Allowing sabotage to masquerade as speech would invite copycats across the infrastructure we all rely on and would force ever-harder policing against everyone. Drawing the line firmly—here, and now—keeps our public square open to argument rather than arms-race.

If conduct changes, the law provides a path to de-proscription. Until then, the order should stand. The pages that follow set out the record, the legal framework, the risks, and the implications with clarity. They are offered to policymakers, regulators, and civic leaders who share one simple commitment: to keep Britain a country where even the fiercest disagreements are settled by words, votes and law, not by those prepared to break things until they get their way.

Status: Proscribed organisation under s.3 Terrorism Act 2000 (TA 2000) following a pattern of high-impact attacks on defence sites and suppliers. A judicial review of proscription is pending; interim relief to suspend the ban was refused.

Bottom line: Protest is protected; organised sabotage of critical assets is not. PA's methods meet the statutory threshold for proscription.

Summary: Palestine Action is not a congregation of spirited marchers who occasionally trespass; it is an organised sabotage network that borrows the costume of protest—banners, slogans, choreographed arrests—to camouflage a campaign aimed at degrading defence capability. The aesthetic is theatrical, but the objective is practical: to render sites inoperable, to impose costly repairs and downtime, and to intimidate staff and suppliers into withdrawal. That is why the group graduates from placards to pry bars, from chanting at gates to entering restricted compounds, from paint on windows to substances and tools directed at machinery and aircraft. The performance is for social feeds; the intended effect is on the physical world.

UK law does not care what a saboteur thinks; it cares what a saboteur does. The Terrorism Act 2000 draws a bright, content-neutral line at serious, coercive damage to property carried out to influence government or intimidate the public. Parliament did not write that test to criminalise noisy dissent; it wrote it because modern coercion often targets infrastructure rather than crowds. When an organisation repeatedly crosses from disruption into the disabling of critical assets—culminating in the attack that grounded RAF aircraft—it meets the threshold the statute sets. Proscription is the legal recognition of that fact.

To proscribe is not to outlaw a cause. Palestine advocacy, however vigorous, remains lawful; so does robust criticism of government and policy. What the order interrupts is a method that endangers safety, corrodes the protest environment, and invites an arms race of “direct action” against essential services. Leave such tactics unchecked and you do not broaden liberty; you shrink it, because every subsequent assembly must reckon with the threat that the loudest faction will escalate from speech to wreckage. Proscription restores the boundary that keeps protest noisy but non-destructive, and gives police and prosecutors the network-level tools—against membership, logistics, finance—to prevent the next orchestrated attack rather than merely tidy up after it.

If conduct changes, the law allows de-proscription; until then, a serious country defends both free expression and public safety by insisting on the difference between argument and sabotage. Keep protest free; keep sabotage proscribed.

What Palestine Action is

- **Nature.** Palestine Action presents itself as a protest movement but is structured as a networked direct-action organisation whose stated purpose is to “shut down” UK defence firms linked to Israel—above all Elbit Systems and its suppliers, landlords, logistics partners and public-sector clients. The centre of gravity is not mass mobilisation but repeat operations by small, trained cells against high-value sites where a few people, with planning and tools, can impose outsized damage and downtime. The target set extends beyond factory floors to include office suites, testing facilities, warehousing, airbase infrastructure connected to military transport, and the corporate ecosystem that hosts or insures defence tenants. In doctrine and practice, the group treats disruption of supply chains and platforms as leverage against government policy.
- **Model.** The operational design borrows from climate and anti-arms precedents: “affinity groups” of three to eight people trained to conduct illegal incursions, execute property damage swiftly, and exit—or remain for arrest—in a way that maximises publicity and court theatre. Around these cells sits a light hub that standardises tactics, amplifies footage, and coordinates legal and fundraising support. Recruitment and training are informal but purposeful: closed briefings, “know-your-rights” sessions, role-plays for lock-ons and roof entries, and OPSEC guidance on phones, reconnaissance and toolkits. Communications are decentralised by design—encrypted messaging, burner devices, need-to-know logistics—while a central media channel packages every operation for social distribution within minutes. The result is a self-healing network: if one cell is disrupted, another can replicate the method with minimal instruction.
- **Aims.** The strategic objective is to coerce both public policy and private commercial behaviour by making targeted operations physically impossible or financially untenable. In practice this means selecting sites where paint jets, chemical dyes, adhesive compounds, cutting tools or simple mechanical tampering can force shutdowns, invalidate safety certificates, trigger insurance investigations, and require expensive plant or aircraft inspections. Each incident is staged to escalate costs beyond the damage itself—lost production days, security upgrades, reputational risk with landlords and insurers, and the chilling effect on staff and contractors. Publicly, the group frames this as “non-violent civil resistance”; operationally, the aim is cumulative incapacitation of defence capability and the deterrence of corporate participation through fear of repeat attacks. The politics ride on top of that method; the method is the point.

Methods and pattern of activity

- **Targets.** PA concentrates on sites where a small team can impose outsized disruption: defence factories that machine or assemble components; corporate offices that house R&D, procurement, or executive functions; logistics hubs and warehouses handling sensitive consignments; and air bases linked to military transport, where interference can ground platforms or trigger costly inspections. The “ecosystem” around core defence firms is also in scope—landlords, facilities managers, insurers, and subcontractors—on the theory that reputational and insurance exposure will encourage them to evict or refuse defence tenants.
- **Tactics.** The operational grammar is repeatable and scalable. Teams conduct pre-action reconnaissance (CCTV, fencing, patrol timings), approach at low-traffic hours, and favour roof entries or forced access through vulnerable doors and skylights. Once inside or atop, they deploy locking-on to delay removal; use high-pressure paint/dye cannons to contaminate equipment and structures; smash glazing and control panels; apply adhesives and expanding foams to shutters, locks and intakes; sever or jam conveyor lines; and stage office occupations to harvest imagery and paperwork for media amplification. Outside the perimeter, teams blockade supply roads with vehicles and chains, creating knock-on delays and contractual penalties. The group periodically announces coordinated multi-site “days of action” to stretch police resources and increase national media lift. Each action is filmed, captioned, and released within minutes to a central channel to maximise narrative control before official statements land.
- **Pattern of activity.** The cadence follows a campaign logic: a burst of actions to gain attention, a legal lull while core actors face hearings, then a renewed wave with copycat cells adopting the same playbook. Targets often rotate geographically to avoid predictable deployments, with returning hits on previously struck sites to showcase “resilience” and to force re-hardening costs on firms. The network exploits shoulder hours (pre-dawn/late night), weekends, and public holidays, and times operations against politically salient dates (parliamentary votes, international summits) to leverage news cycles. Arrests are incorporated into the theatre: defendants deliver rehearsed statements, and case outcomes—acquittals, hung juries, even convictions—are reframed as proof of moral legitimacy and recruitment fodder.
- **OPSEC and logistics.** Cells use encrypted messaging, burner devices, and compartmentalised roles (lookouts, tool carriers, media) to reduce the intelligence value of any single arrest. Tools are pre-staged; clothing is disposable; vehicles are often hired with layered identities. Basic counter-forensics—gloves, overshoes, minimising time-on-target—aim to complicate evidence chains. Legal and welfare support is activated in parallel (solicitors on standby, public fundraising, accommodation for bailed activists) to ensure repeatability.
- **Impact mechanics.** The tactical goal is to convert modest material damage into disproportionate operational cost. Dyes and particulates can trigger halted production, require HSE and insurance inspections, void clean-room certifications, and force full system strip-downs. Tampering—actual or suspected—pushes firms to shut equipment pending engineer sign-off; even false positives impose downtime. Blockades jeopardise delivery SLAs, risking liquidated damages and reputational hits with customers. Each incident is publicised to heighten perceived risk among landlords, insurers, and subcontractors, nudging them to exit contracts or tighten terms for defence tenants.
- **Safety risks and threshold crossing.** Prior to June 2025, many incidents, while unlawful, were framed as “symbolic disruption.” The Brize Norton attack—with paint and implements deployed against RAF Voyager aircraft—shifted the profile decisively into safety-critical sabotage. Interference with aircraft components, even superficially, compels exhaustive engineering checks and component replacement; authorities estimated multi-million-pound consequences and grounded platforms pending inspection. That escalation crystallised the Government’s case that PA’s method had moved beyond theatrical protest into conduct Parliament explicitly placed within the Terrorism Act’s scope: serious damage to property, ideologically motivated, designed to influence government.
- **After-effects on the protest environment.** Each high-impact operation seeds copycat risk and drags the wider protest sphere toward coercive tactics, pressuring police to treat all related assemblies as potential staging grounds. This corrodes civic space by normalising equipment attacks, increasing confrontations at perimeters, and burdening local communities near targeted sites with repeated disorder and fear of escalation.
- **Why this pattern matters for proscription.** The consistency of targets (defence ecosystem, military transport links), the planned and trained modus operandi, the intent to incapacitate rather than merely inconvenience, and the documented escalation to platform-level sabotage together form a pattern that meets the statutory test of being “concerned in terrorism.” Proscription, in that light, is not a view about a political cause; it is the state’s response to a method that has crossed the bright line between protest and the deliberate degradation of critical assets.

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Legal framework engaged

Terrorism Act 2000 (TA 2000) — definition and reach:

Section 1 defines “terrorism” to include serious damage to property carried out to influence the government or intimidate the public for a political, religious, racial or ideological purpose. The definition is deliberately content-neutral and method-focused: you do not need explosives or casualties; sustained attacks on critical assets intended to coerce policy fall within scope. This is the hinge on which PA’s conduct turns.

Proscription power and its effects:

Under s.3 TA 2000, the Home Secretary may proscribe any organisation “concerned in terrorism” (committing, preparing for, promoting, encouraging, or otherwise concerned in terrorism). Once an organisation is proscribed, three core offences bite immediately:

- s.11 — membership of a proscribed organisation;
- s.12 — inviting support for it (including arranging or speaking at meetings in support of it);
- s.13 — displaying articles or wearing clothing in a manner arousing reasonable suspicion of support.

These are complemented by terrorist financing offences in ss.15–19 (fund-raising, use/possession of money for terrorist purposes, arrangements to facilitate funding), and by possession-style offences where relevant (e.g., s.57 possession for terrorist purposes; s.58 collecting/possessing information likely to be useful to a terrorist). The Terrorism Act 2006 adds encouragement (s.1) and dissemination of terrorist publications (s.2) where messaging crosses those thresholds.

Ordinary criminal law still applies:

Proscription does not replace general offences; it adds network-level tools. Police and CPS still charge where appropriate under:

- Criminal Damage Act 1971 (simple/intentional and aggravated damage);
- Burglary and going equipped offences;
- Aggravated trespass (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994);
- Official Secrets Act / “prohibited places” and designated sites legislation for breaches of sensitive locations;
- Public Order Act offences (fear or provocation of violence, harassment/alarm/distress), conspiracy and attempt under the Serious Crime Act/Criminal Law Act.
- These sit alongside Health and Safety and Aviation regulations where plant or aircraft safety is implicated.

What proscription enables in practice.:

- Upstream disruption: Police can interdict funding, logistics, recruitment and event planning tied to the banner before an operation occurs, rather than waiting for a fresh “completed” criminal damage.
- Clarity for platforms/venues: Public authorities, universities, councils and venue operators have a bright-line basis to refuse bookings, premises, publicity and grants linked to the proscribed identity, reducing litigation risk by pointing to Parliament’s designation.
- Asset restraint and proceeds: Where funds or assets are suspected of terrorism purposes, investigators can use TA 2000 financing powers and Proceeds of Crime Act tools to freeze and forfeit.
- Duty interfaces: The order aligns with the Prevent duty (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015), supports licensing and Safety Advisory Group conditions for events, and informs Charity Commission decisions where trustees or grantees risk terror-links.

Safeguards and challenge routes:

Proscription is made by Statutory Instrument subject to the affirmative procedure in both Houses. An organisation (or an affected person) may apply for de-proscription; refusal can be appealed to the Proscribed Organisations Appeals Commission (POAC) and onward on a point of law. Judicial review remains available. In parallel, all policing and prosecutorial actions remain constrained by the Human Rights Act 1998 (Articles 9–11, proportionality) and the CPS Full Code Test.

Post-proscription posture for public bodies:

Authorities should maintain a content-neutral approach: peaceful Palestine advocacy remains lawful, while support for the proscribed organisation is not. Decision-making should be documented through proportionality and equality assessments (Public Sector Equality Duty) to keep the line clear: protest protected, sabotage methods and organisational support prohibited.

How PA frames itself — and the counter-analysis

- Claim: “Non-violent civil resistance; ordinary criminal law is sufficient.”
- PA’s branding leans on the iconography of sit-ins and “civil resistance,” but the operational record is a patterned series of incursions and deliberate damage against safety-critical sites. Under s.1 Terrorism Act 2000, serious damage to property undertaken to influence government for an ideological aim is terrorism even without explosives or bodily injury. Interference with aircraft and defence plant compels shutdowns, engineering inspections, and component replacement—risk and cost that ordinary criminal damage charges have demonstrably failed to deter. Proscription is designed precisely for this problem: it equips police to disrupt the network—fundraising, logistics, command-and-control—rather than playing case-by-case whack-a-mole with individual offenders who treat court appearances as theatre.
- Claim: “Proscription criminalises speech and Palestine solidarity.”
- The order does not outlaw a viewpoint; it outlaws support for a named organisation whose method is coercive sabotage. Palestine advocacy, marches, petitions, op-eds and robust criticism of UK or Israeli policy remain legal—and are policed every weekend across the country. What crosses the line is membership, invited support, and material assistance to a group that systematically targets critical assets. The distinction is content-neutral and method-based: argue anything you like, but not under a banner that organises break-ins, plant contamination, or aircraft tampering.
- Claim: “This is disproportionate / a misuse of counter-terror law.”
- Parliament wrote the TA 2000 definition to capture modern coercion against infrastructure, not only violence against persons. Both Houses scrutinised and approved the proscription order; courts retain full oversight through judicial review, POAC appeals, and the Human Rights Act’s proportionality tests. In that framework “proportionality” asks whether the measure pursues a legitimate aim (public safety, national security), is rationally connected to it (network disruption where ordinary offences failed), uses the least intrusive means realistically available (membership/support offences, not viewpoint bans), and strikes a fair balance. On those criteria, proscription answers a demonstrated escalation with a tool tailored to the source of harm: the organised method.
- Claim: “International voices say the ban chills rights.”
- UN special-procedure statements and NGO communiqués are part of debate, not binding law. In the UK, Articles 10 and 11 ECHR (expression and assembly) are qualified rights: restrictions are lawful where prescribed by law, pursue legitimate aims, and are necessary in a democratic society. A state is entitled to prevent organised campaigns that endanger life, safety, or essential services—especially when the restriction is narrowly targeted at organisational support rather than ideas. The UK remains bound to Strasbourg scrutiny; that external check coexists with domestic parliamentary approval and judicial review. In short: rights are protected, but coercive sabotage is not sheltered by them.

Risk picture for the UK

- Public safety.
- The shift from perimeter trespass to plant and platform sabotage creates non-theoretical hazards. Tampering—real or suspected—forces emergency shutdowns, brings engineers and first responders into potentially compromised environments, and increases accident risk during hurried isolations and inspections. Contamination of equipment with dyes, particulates or adhesives can invalidate safety certifications and mask defects that would otherwise be visible, raising the probability of latent failures after restart. Staff intimidation—filming, doxxing, threats at gates—produces fatigue and error-prone conditions. Surrounding communities face secondary risks: road blockades impede ambulances and fire services; chemical dispersal (even “non-toxic” agents) prompts precautionary cordons and shelter-in-place guidance that disrupts schools, care homes and local businesses.
- Critical infrastructure contagion.
- Methods honed against defence sites—roof entry, lock-ons, adhesive compounds, paint cannons, conveyor jamming, vehicle blockades—are portable to aviation airside areas, container ports, fuel depots, high-voltage substations, data centres and telecom hubs. The attraction is asymmetry: small teams, low-cost tools, outsized impact through inspections, regulatory holds and insurance mandates. Copycat adoption would stretch specialist policing (CT, ports, CNI units) and private security beyond surge capacity, inviting a cascading vulnerability where simultaneous low-grade attacks cause disproportionate national disruption (flight cancellations, port backlogs, brownouts, loss of digital services).
- Policing and civic space.
- Normalising equipment attacks warps protest incentives. If “effectiveness” is measured by damage and downtime rather than message and numbers, organisers are rewarded for escalation and secrecy. That corrodes the social licence that allows large, noisy but peaceful assemblies to proceed with light-touch policing. The predictable response—heavier cordons, earlier conditions, more Section 12/14 directions, pre-emptive arrests—then fuels claims of over-policing and chills lawful participation. In short, sabotage breeds securitisation, securitisation breeds grievance, and the civic square narrows for everyone. The “saboteur’s veto” also pressures local authorities and venue operators to cancel lawful events out of fear of equipment attacks, undermining equal access to public space.
- Community relations.
- Targeted campaigns around specific workplaces generate ambient intimidation: employees are filmed and named online; contractors receive threats; local minority communities living near sites are blamed or harassed. Demonstrations at perimeters often spill into town centres, producing confrontations with counter-protesters and police, with knock-on disorder that hardens communal attitudes. Recruitment rhetoric romanticising “direct action” as the only moral route isolates moderates, polarises campus and workplace climates, and imports overseas conflicts into neighbourhood disputes. Over time, affected towns experience reputational damage (insurers harden terms; firms relocate), feeding a narrative of neglect that further strains relations between residents, authorities and activists.
- Economic and regulatory risk.
- Even when physical harm is avoided, repeated incidents trigger insurance premium hikes, higher self-insured retentions, and tougher licence and compliance regimes (HSE, CAA, MCA, Ofgem/Ofcom), all of which raise costs for firms and the public sector. Supply-chain reliability suffers; SMEs in the ecosystem—couriers, cleaners, caterers—absorb the shock through lost shifts and contract churn. If landlords and financiers begin to view defence-adjacent tenants as uninsurable reputational risks, the UK’s capability base erodes quietly, with strategic dependence shifting abroad.
- Legal system strain.
- Serial low-level but high-impact offences produce court backlogs, repeated custody cycles, and pressure on prisons and probation, while jury-trial theatrics seek nullification rather than adjudication. Without network-level disruption, the system is left to process dozens of defendants episodically, diverting resources from serious violence and complex crime.
- Strategic summary.
- Left unchecked, the pattern converts a handful of activists into a risk-multiplier across safety, infrastructure, policing norms, and communal trust. The immediate victims are workers and nearby residents; the long-term casualty is the civic compact that separates protected protest from coercive damage to the systems everyone relies on.

Government position — why proscription is justified

- It's about method, not cause.
- The proscription decision does not adjudicate a political argument; it addresses a modus operandi. UK terrorism law is drafted to be content-neutral: it asks what was done, to whom or to what, with what intention and effect—not what the actors believed. A campaign that repeatedly targets critical assets—factories, logistics hubs, and, ultimately, military aircraft—with the aim of coercing government policy engages the statute because the means endanger people and systems the public relies on. Peaceful advocacy for Palestinians remains lawful; the organised use of sabotage does not.
- The line is where sabotage begins.
- Britain can—and does—tolerate loud, inconvenient protest. The red line is crossed when tactics shift from disruption of opinions to degradation of capability: disabling aircraft, breaching bases, contaminating plant, tampering with equipment so that operations halt and safety inspections become mandatory. At that point you have left public-order territory and entered the Terrorism Act definition of conduct designed to influence government by causing serious damage to property. The law draws that boundary precisely to prevent an arms race in “direct action” against infrastructure.
- Parliament set the standard; PA met it.
- Proscription under section 3 is a parliamentary power with affirmative scrutiny in both Houses and full judicial oversight (judicial review; POAC appeal; Human Rights Act proportionality). Ministers must show that an organisation is “concerned in terrorism” (committing, preparing for, promoting, encouraging or otherwise concerned in it). The documented escalation to safety-critical sabotage satisfied that threshold. The regime is not one-way: if conduct changes and the threat abates, de-proscription is available through the statutory process. Until then, the order stands to protect the public and the integrity of national defence.
- Protest is protected; coercion isn't.
- The decision does not criminalise Palestine solidarity, marches, petitions, campus debates, or sharp-edged speech. It criminalises membership and material support for a specific organisation whose method is organised sabotage. That distinction preserves vigorous protest while refusing to normalise operations against defence targets. It also restores clarity for police, prosecutors, universities, councils and venues: uphold equal access to public space for lawful protest, and deny platforms and funds to the network that treats wrecking as a tactic.
- Why this matters beyond one case.
- Leaving such tactics unchecked would incentivise copycats across airports, ports, energy, data and health infrastructure, shrinking civic space for everyone as policing hardens in response. Proscription is therefore not an act of censorship but a guardrail: it keeps Britain a country where fierce arguments are settled by words, votes and law, not by those prepared to break things until they get their way.

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