# Metropolitan Police confront challenges as Palestine Action faces terror proscription amid London protests



The Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, has voiced his shock and frustration over a planned protest in London in support of Palestine Action, a group recently involved in direct actions against military assets in the UK. This group, which drew attention after activists sprayed red paint on military planes at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire last Friday, is on the brink of being proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the government. The home secretary is reportedly preparing a written statement for Parliament that would legally designate Palestine Action as an extremist criminal group.

Sir Mark Rowley emphasised the importance of the right to protest but noted that activities linked to Palestine Action cross the line into criminality for most people. Until the group is officially banned, the Met lacks power to prevent the London protest but will impose conditions to avoid disorder and damage. The police have promised to deal robustly with any breaches of the law during the demonstration, which is supported by around 35 organisations, including notable pro-Palestinian groups, the Stop the War Coalition, Cage, and Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND).

Palestine Action members have rejected the government's move to classify them as terrorists. Saeed Taji Farouky, a member of the group, described the proscription plans as "absurd" and warned that it threatens fundamental British democratic principles. He defended their recent actions, stating that their aim is to disrupt the material supply networks they believe fuel what they call genocide in Gaza. The escalation of their tactics corresponds with the intensification of the conflict in Gaza, where over 55,000 people have died, including more than 15,000 children, according to Gaza’s Hamas-run health ministry.

The political reaction to the break-in at RAF Brize Norton has been sharply divided. Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer condemned the paint attack on military planes as "disgraceful," and counter-terrorism police are investigating the incident. Some Westminster figures, like former Home Secretary Suella Braverman, have welcomed the decision to ban Palestine Action, calling it "absolutely the correct decision." On the other hand, Labour MP Zarah Sultana cautioned against suppressing protest, recalling the mass demonstrations against the Iraq war in 2003 and drawing parallels to the current situation. Amnesty International UK expressed deep concern about the use of counter-terrorism laws to shut down protests, warning it risks stifling legitimate dissent.

This contentious issue sits within a broader context of sustained and highly visible pro-Palestinian protests in London that have been ongoing since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict in October 2023. The Metropolitan Police have acknowledged shortcomings in their management of these demonstrations. Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist admitted the force did not "get everything right," particularly in October 2023 when protests were large and disruptive, costing nearly £43 million and involving around 52,000 officers over several months. The scale and intensity of these protests have strained police resources significantly.

Commissioner Rowley has also highlighted the impact of the protests on policing, citing a rise in hate crimes and the challenge of managing public order amid contentious and emotive events. The force has faced criticism for its handling of some pro-Palestinian rallies, notably one in late October where only a handful of arrests were made despite the attendance of about 100,000 people. There were reported incidents such as chanting "jihad" and the display of flags resembling those of extremist groups, which caused public and political concern. The police defended their approach by noting the complexity of responding to certain behaviours—such as chants like "jihad," a term with multiple meanings—but committed to engaging individuals involved to prevent incitement.

Balancing the right to protest with the need to maintain public order and counter extremist actions remains a critical and delicate task for the Metropolitan Police. The upcoming proscription of Palestine Action marks a significant development in the government's response to these challenges, but it also raises important questions about civil liberties and the boundaries of protest in a democratic society.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c79q1jv8p24o), [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/22/met-police-stood-aside-palestine-israel-rally-london/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c79q1jv8p24o)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c79q1jv8p24o), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy0rer2k01no), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/met-police-gaza-protests-arrests-london-policing-just-stop-oil-b1180819.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c79q1jv8p24o), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/02/policing-israel-palestine-protests-stretching-met-resources-commissioner-says), [[5]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/uk-world-news/live-updates-100000-people-set-28001071)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c79q1jv8p24o), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy0rer2k01no), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/02/policing-israel-palestine-protests-stretching-met-resources-commissioner-says), [[6]](https://www.thejc.com/news/metropolitan-police-criticised-after-failing-to-take-action-over-jihad-chants-at-pro-palestine-protest-dnvfvssg)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c79q1jv8p24o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy0rer2k01no> - The Metropolitan Police acknowledged shortcomings in their handling of large-scale pro-Palestinian protests in London, particularly in October 2023. Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist admitted that the force 'didn't get everything right' and could have made arrests sooner. The protests, which began in early October, have had a cumulative impact on London and its communities, costing the police almost £43 million and involving nearly 52,000 officers. The Policy Exchange think tank highlighted the challenges posed by increasingly disruptive protests on public services and the economy.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/02/policing-israel-palestine-protests-stretching-met-resources-commissioner-says> - Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley expressed concerns about the strain on resources due to ongoing pro-Palestinian protests in London. He noted that the protests have led to increased hate crimes and have been challenging to manage. Rowley highlighted the need for more officers and resources to effectively police these demonstrations, emphasizing the impact on both the police force and the wider community.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/22/met-police-stood-aside-palestine-israel-rally-london/> - The Metropolitan Police faced criticism for their handling of a pro-Palestinian rally in London on October 21, 2023. Despite around 100,000 attendees, only 10 arrests were made, leading to accusations of inadequate intervention. Incidents such as protesters climbing scaffolding, chanting 'jihad,' and displaying flags resembling those of ISIS were reported, raising questions about the police's response to potential public order offenses.
5. <https://www.mylondon.news/news/uk-world-news/live-updates-100000-people-set-28001071> - A pro-Palestinian protest in London on October 27, 2023, saw around 100,000 participants marching from Marble Arch to Whitehall. The Metropolitan Police imposed conditions under the Public Order Act to prevent gatherings outside the Israeli Embassy. Commander Kyle Gordon emphasized the balance between the right to protest and laws against hate speech and terrorism, stating that officers would intervene if calls for 'jihad' against Israel were made.
6. <https://www.thejc.com/news/metropolitan-police-criticised-after-failing-to-take-action-over-jihad-chants-at-pro-palestine-protest-dnvfvssg> - The Metropolitan Police faced criticism for not taking action against 'jihad' chants during a pro-Palestinian protest in London on October 21, 2023. Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick described the chanting as 'inciting terrorist violence.' The police stated that while the word 'jihad' has multiple meanings, they would identify and speak to individuals involved to discourage similar chanting in the future.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/met-police-gaza-protests-arrests-london-policing-just-stop-oil-b1180819.html> - The Metropolitan Police admitted to shortcomings in their handling of pro-Palestinian protests in London, particularly in October 2023. Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist acknowledged that the force 'didn't get everything right' and could have made arrests sooner. The protests have had a significant impact on London, with the police spending almost £43 million and deploying nearly 52,000 officers between October 2023 and June 2024.