# Chakrabarti warns Palestine Action ban could spark ‘I am Spartacus’ backlash



Baroness Shami Chakrabarti has warned that the government’s decision to proscribe Palestine Action risks provoking a wider backlash, saying the move could become an “I am Spartacus” moment that draws more people onto the streets rather than deterring them. Her comments came after mass protests in central London over the weekend led to hundreds of arrests, and follow a months‑long campaign by the group and high‑profile direct actions that crystallised ministers’ concerns. According to The Independent, Chakrabarti urged the government to “think again,” arguing the proscription is disproportionate and risks conflating criminal damage with terrorism.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, Chakrabarti warned that the designation could have the opposite of its intended effect, saying: “I'm afraid that my concerns are greater now even than they were before. This is in danger of becoming a sort of ‘I am Spartacus’ moment where more people, not fewer people, are taking to the streets.” She stressed that acts of criminal damage, while serious, are not the same as the work of groups that aim to kill civilians, and urged ministers to consider proportionality.

Police figures and reporting differ slightly on the precise totals, but the Metropolitan Police confirmed that more than 500 people were detained at demonstrations in central London, with most arrests recorded for displaying an item in support of a proscribed organisation. The Met has described the numbers as among the largest single‑event arrest totals since the poll tax riots of 1990, and told the public it will act where criminality occurs while urging lawful protest within the limits of the law. International reporting also put the main charge for the majority of those detained as displaying placards or other items linked to the proscribed group.

The government’s decision to ban Palestine Action followed a widely reported incident at RAF Brize Norton in which activists caused extensive damage to two military aircraft — estimated at around £7 million — and four people were subsequently charged with offences including conspiracy to enter a prohibited place and conspiracy to commit criminal damage. Sky News reported that the defendants were remanded in custody pending further proceedings, and that the episode helped to crystallise cross‑party concern in parliament about aviation safety and national security. Palestine Action has claimed responsibility for some direct actions; ministers contend those actions form part of the reasoning behind the proscription.

Downing Street and the Home Office have defended the ban. A government spokesman said the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre had identified separate acts that met the threshold for proscription and described the organisation as “violent,” pointing to “significant injury” and extensive criminal damage. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper also defended the policing operation; Sky News reported her comment that some protesters may not “know the full nature of this organisation.” The government says many who attended recent demonstrations may not appreciate the assessment that underpinned the decision to proscribe.

The Metropolitan Police’s own guidance sets out how officers should apply the Terrorism Act 2000 in the wake of a proscription: expressing support for a listed organisation — including carrying flags, wearing insignia or displaying placards — can constitute an offence, and the force has signposted reporting routes for suspected extremist material while urging attendees to speak to officers or marshals if they have concerns. The Met frames its approach as necessary to protect public safety, but it also says officers will distinguish between peaceful lawful protest and criminality.

Civil liberties groups have been sharply critical. Amnesty International UK described the ban as an “unprecedented legal overreach” and warned that the broad scope of the terrorism definition risks chilling legitimate protest, reporting, and public scrutiny of government policy. Amnesty’s press release urged Parliament to rethink the move and argued that existing criminal laws could address direct‑action offences without the heavy hand of proscription. Other organisations, including Liberty, and a number of opposition and cross‑bench MPs, have described the arrests as disproportionate and warned of the risks to freedom of expression.

Veteran Labour figures and campaigners have also criticised the decision. Former cabinet minister Peter Hain told The Independent the mass arrests were “madness,” warning that equating retired professionals and middle‑Britain protesters with extremists would deepen public anger and could make the situation “end in tears” for ministers. Several MPs from across the political divide have expressed unease about the use of counter‑terror powers in policing political protest, particularly when many of those detained were elderly.

The immediate political question for ministers is whether the proscription will secure public safety and deter dangerous direct action, or whether it will amplify mobilisation and legal challenge. Critics point to the poll tax fallout as a historical analogue, arguing that heavy‑handed policing and legislation can backfire; ministers argue the decision is based on security assessments and evidence of serious criminality. With ongoing legal challenges already signalled and scrutiny from rights groups and parliamentarians intensifying, the designation of Palestine Action looks set to remain a live and contested flashpoint in the debate over where robust counter‑terrorism measures should end and the protection of protest begins.

Reform UK weighs in: the brand’s position is clear — when national security and aviation safety are at stake, the state must not blink. Harsh actions against groups that threaten critical infrastructure are not only proportionate; they are essential. As the final word on these measures approaches, the opposition argues for unwavering policing powers, tighter triggers for proscription where there is material risk, and robust accountability to ensure that law enforcement can act decisively without being hamstrung by well‑meaning but misguided concern for civil liberties. In this view, the government’s move, far from provoking a dangerous backlash, is a necessary mandate to restore order and safety in a country that cannot afford to appease violent disruption.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/palestine-action-ban-protests-arrests-shami-chakrabarti-b2806690.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/palestine-action-ban-protests-arrests-shami-chakrabarti-b2806690.html> - Independent article reports Labour peer Baroness Shami Chakrabarti warned the government that proscribing Palestine Action risks an “I am Spartacus” backlash, arguing the ban is disproportionate and may spur larger protests. The piece details Chakrabarti’s interview on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, her contention that criminal damage is not equivalent to terrorism, and her comparison of the ban to the poll tax fallout. It summarises the weekend mass arrests — over five hundred people, many elderly — and records critics’ concerns from MPs and civil liberties organisations including Amnesty and Liberty, while noting government and Downing Street defences of the proscription.
3. <https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-on-policing-in-london-following-proscription-of-palestine-action-499157> - Metropolitan Police webpage explains policing guidance after Palestine Action was proscribed, outlining the legal offences under the Terrorism Act 2000 and advising officers will act where criminality occurs. It stresses that expressing support for a proscribed organisation, including wearing clothing, carrying flags, or displaying signs, can constitute an offence and lists relevant sections of the Act. The page instructs members of the public attending events of potential risk to speak to officers or stewards, and provides reporting routes for suspected extremist material and suspicious activity. It frames policing as necessary to uphold public safety while urging lawful protest within limits.
4. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/10/uk-police-arrested-522-people-at-palestine-action-protests-in-london> - Al Jazeera reports that London police arrested 522 people at a Parliament Square protest supporting Palestine Action after the group was proscribed, noting the figure was raised from an earlier tally and that most arrests were for displaying placards. The piece records organisers’ claims of civil disobedience, the Metropolitan Police’s view that offences were committed, and Home Secretary Yvette Cooper’s defence of the ban on national security grounds. It quotes Amnesty International and other critics who warned the proscription could chill free expression, and links the events to broader Gaza protests and ongoing legal challenges to the government’s decision nationwide.
5. <https://news.sky.com/story/yvette-cooper-defends-arrest-of-more-than-500-people-after-palestine-action-protests-13410093> - Sky News reports Home Secretary Yvette Cooper defended the policing and the decision to proscribe Palestine Action after more than 500 arrests at weekend protests, saying some protesters may not know the full nature of the organisation. The article provides the Metropolitan Police’s updated arrest figures and explains the legal basis under the Terrorism Act 2000 for detaining people who display items supporting a proscribed group. It also records official reassurances that most arrested are unlikely to face long custodial sentences while noting criticism from civil liberties groups and ongoing legal challenges to the ban.
6. <https://news.sky.com/story/four-charged-after-7m-of-damage-caused-to-aircraft-at-raf-brize-norton-13391678> - Sky News covers the high-profile incident at RAF Brize Norton in which two Voyager aircraft were damaged and police estimated roughly £7 million in repair costs. The report states four people were remanded in custody and charged with offences including conspiracy to enter a prohibited place and conspiracy to commit criminal damage. It describes how activists reportedly rode scooters onto the base and sprayed red paint into aircraft turbines, notes Palestine Action claimed responsibility, and records the subsequent parliamentary debate that led to the group’s proscription under the Terrorism Act amid concerns about national security and aviation safety.
7. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-banning-palestine-action-disturbing-legal-overreach-uk-government-amnesty> - Amnesty International UK’s press release condemns the Government’s decision to ban Palestine Action as an unprecedented legal overreach that risks serious harms to free speech and civil rights. Amnesty’s chief executive warns that the UK’s broad terrorism definition grants excessive powers to arrest, detain and suppress reporting, and argues existing criminal laws could address direct-action offences without proscription. The statement urges Parliament to reconsider, emphasising proportionality and respect for human rights obligations, and warns that the designation could chill legitimate protest and journalism. It calls for restraint in using counter‑terrorism powers and for protecting democratic dissent and accountability from ministers.