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Craig Murray: Who Are the Terrorists?

In 1985, the U.K. backed apartheid South Africa and said the African National Congress were terrorists. Now they back apartheid Israel and say Hamas and Hezbollah are terrorists. The state can be wrong.



Nkosi Zwelivelile Mandla Mandela with a poster of his grandfather Nelson Mandela at a 2018 celebration of South Africa's Constitution. (GovernmentZA, Flickr, CC BY-ND 2.0)

I have a confession to make.

When a journalist writes this it generally means they will proceed to reveal something they hope will actually show them in a good light or justified in some way. But I have a real confession to make, of something I did that was wrong.

Somewhere in the U.K., among the papers of a dead loved one which nobody has the heart to throw out, in cardboard boxes in dusty attics or deep in the filing cabinets of Jeremy Corbyn, exist still a few copies of thousands of letters bearing my authentic signature.

These letters, on expensive paper with an impressive Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) crested header, state that the British government will not deal with the African National Congress because it is a terrorist organisation.

Many of them go on to state that Nelson Mandela is a terrorist who was rightly convicted of terrorism by a South African court after a free and fair trial.

I really did write those thousands of letters, not just sign them. I did not believe a single word of it, and was only “doing my job” as a civil servant, but in a sense that makes it worse.

So I know how many government functionaries currently feel in carrying out the government’s policy of supporting and indeed actively participating in genocide.

When I joined the FCO, in my “fast stream” intake of 22 I was one of only two who was not public school and the only one who was not Oxbridge. I also had the unusual background of being a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Friends of Palestine and various other activist groups.

I could not be excluded because in the several days and stages of public examinations I had (tied with two others) outperformed everybody else of the 80,000 people who had entered the Civil Service administrative exams (it was 1984 with 3.5 million unemployed).

But the security services were not happy, and my “positive vetting” was delayed. This is an extremely exhaustive process (nowadays direct vetting) for those with the highest security clearance. An MOD officer, usually retired military, is assigned to investigate everything about you for months, including interviewing many who know you.

So while I joined the FCO in September 1984, for five months I was not given a job but rather put on full time French language training together with three other misfits (one of whom I think was being given extra investigation because his uncle was Roger Hollis).

South Africa Desk



Street art in San Francisco in 2012 shows Nelson Mandela addressing the crowd from a Cape Town city hall balcony, after his release on Feb. 11, 1990, from 27 years in prison. (Julie Pimentel, Flickr, CC BY-NC 2.0)

In the end my positive vetting was left with a query, and I was pulled in to see the head of the Personnel Department. They said that they had decided to grant my vetting certificate, but that I was going to be placed on the South Africa (Political) desk as a direct test of whether it was possible for me to put my politics aside and function as a civil servant.

So I did. You tell yourself many things to get by, chiefly that the U.K. is a democracy and ministers are elected by voters to determine policy; whereas you as a civil servant are merely carrying through the wishes of the voters.

Margaret Thatcher was prime minister and she simply was a straightforward supporter of apartheid. This is much denied but I am an eye witness. Geoffrey Howe was foreign minister and it was never easy to determine what he thought about anything. Junior ministers running day-to-day policy were Lynda Chalker and Malcolm Rifkind, who were both viscerally anti-apartheid.

But the line that Mandela was a terrorist and the ANC a terrorist organisation was dictated by Thatcher and absolutely insisted upon.

Strong Anti-Apartheid Campaign in UK

It is difficult now to explain the intensity of feeling in the U.K. and the strength of the anti-apartheid campaign. Scores of letters would arrive every day, many from MPs, and — this bit is hard to believe now — in those days every letter would be answered point by point, not with a generic reply.

I was writing those replies by hand, and then giving them to the secretaries to type up. In 1985 the department got its first word processor and I was able to draft 40 template paragraphs and select from those for the replies. Out those replies went, from Craig Murray, stating that Nelson Mandela was a terrorist, thousands of them.

I was very actively involved in the Whitehall battle to change the policy, but that is a different story which I have in part explained before.

But this is an extremely important thought that I want you all to ponder.

In 1985, the Terrorism Act 2000 was still 15 years away. There was no such thing as a proscribed organisation under the Terrorism Act.

Under today's legislation, every single one of those people writing in support of the African National Congress or out campaigning for the release of Nelson Mandela would have been liable for arrest under Section 12 1 (a) of the Terrorism Act.

That is the danger of allowing the state to dictate whom you must consider a terrorist and punishing those who disagree with the state.

In 1985 the official position of the British state was that the ANC were terrorists and apartheid South Africa were the good guys.

In 2024 the official position of the British state is that Hamas and Hezbollah are terrorists and apartheid Israel are the good guys.

The state can be wrong.

It is therefore not an irony that Primer Minister Keir Starmer and Home Secretary Yvette Cooper banned Nelson Mandela’s grandson from entering the U.K. as a “terrorist sympathiser” because of his support for Palestine. In this as so much else, Starmer is a follower of Thatcher.



Starmer and Cooper visiting the National Crime Agency in September. (Simon Dawson / No 10 Downing Street, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The difference 40 years later is that the state is now persecuting British citizens and locking them up for daring to say that the state can be wrong.

The ANC example explains why it is essential we do not give way to this pressure.

Let us face facts. Like most resistance units against colonialism, the ANC were indeed forced by the exigencies of asymmetric warfare into actions that were careless of, or even targeted the lives of, colonial settler civilians.

That did not put them on the wrong side of history. Apartheid South Africa was wrong just as Apartheid Israel is wrong. Occupied people have, in international law, the right of armed

resistance. Within that context of lawful struggle, individuals remain accountable for individual war crimes.

The Terrorism Act, abused by the Israel lobby to make it illegal to support Israel's opponents, is fundamentally bad legislation. It literally provides for up to 14 years in jail if you "express an opinion" in favour of a proscribed organisation.

Forty years ago it would have been used against the large majority of the population who "expressed an opinion" in favour of the ANC, officially viewed as a terrorist organisation.

The sickening ratcheting up of pressure on Palestine supporters by super Zionist Starmer continued on Oct. 17 with a 6 a.m. raid on highly distinguished journalist Asa Winstanley. All his electronics and journalistic materials were seized.

[See: *Police Escalate Britain's War on Independent Journalism*]

Panicked Zionist "elites" who run Western states are lashing out in fear at their opponents. As their popular support evaporates in the face of clear evidence of appalling Israeli atrocities, they are resorting to the methods of fascism.

Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. His coverage is entirely dependent on reader support. Subscriptions to keep this blog going are gratefully received.

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