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[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

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[HUDA AMMORI](#)

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## ***Tactics of Disruption***

*Palestine Action is among the UK's most militant and effective activist networks – coordinating the sabotage of arms factories which supply the Israeli state. You co-founded the group in July 2020, following a surge in IDF violence across the occupied territories. How has it developed, and what role has it played since October 7th?*

Palestine Action takes aim at the infrastructure that sustains the Israeli occupation. Our main target is Elbit Systems, Israel's largest weapons firm, which has a major presence here in Britain. Since we launched five years ago, we've engaged in various actions like rooftop occupations and obstructing companies involved in the arms supply chain. After October 7th our work dramatically intensified, both in terms of the number of people who have joined and the scale of the actions themselves. We've seen people break into factories and destroy quadcopter drones – the remote-controlled devices that Israel has used to massacre children in Gaza. Activists have allegedly caused millions of pounds worth of damage to Elbit's Kent factory. In March last year, we saw the permanent closure of the Elbit factory in Tamworth in Staffordshire. More than a dozen companies have now cut ties with Elbit because of the campaign. Both the Israeli Embassy and Elbit itself have complained to the government about the problems Palestine Action is causing, and we've begun to see a reduction in the Ministry of Defence contracts given to the company. So it's clear that our actions are having a tangible impact.

*In targeting weapons factories, are you hoping to materially damage the Israeli war machine, or is it more about generating publicity and raising consciousness – or is it a combination of the two?*

We're very clear that our primary purpose is disruption. Naturally we use social media to broadcast our actions, to inform people about what's going on in these factories and

encourage others to join us. But the point is not simply to 'raise awareness' or put pressure on politicians. We bypass politicians and go straight to the aggressors. This takes two forms. The first is about slowing the pace of the violence and making it harder for Israel to carry out its aims. When activists broke into the Kent factory, for example, they forced Elbit to cancel certain export licenses. If you stop a weapons factory from running, even for a day, you've already achieved something significant. The hope is that the sustained disruption of these firms will hit their profit margins, losing them contracts and ultimately forcing them to shut down. The second form of disruption is focused on the Israeli economy. Companies like Elbit advertise the fact that all their weapons are tested on Palestinians, which is how they secure their position in the global trading network and drive growth on the domestic front. If you strike at this network, you can destabilize the Zionist project itself.

*To succeed, this kind of direct action would surely need to target the US as well, given that Israel is much more reliant on the world hegemon than on the UK.*

Palestine Action has been operating in the US – it managed to shut down an Elbit office in Boston – and we're currently expanding across Europe, with some groups springing up in Germany amid the intense repression there. But the UK's role is not insignificant. Israel describes it as one of its most important allies, which is largely because of these strong commercial ties. Israel's plan to expand its weapons sector involves drawing on the resources and expertise of Western countries. Were Elbit prevented from operating here, it would pose a major logistical problem. So there's a strong case to be made that driving it out is a strategic priority for the anticolonial movement. While the resistance in Palestine is focused on defending its own territory, its allies elsewhere can try to erase Israel's global military footprint.

*Britain has also seen the largest Palestine solidarity demonstrations in Europe since the onset of the genocide. Do these complement your strategy or conflict with it?*

In my view these are essentially state-sanctioned protests, organized in collaboration with the police, and for that reason they were never going to pose a serious threat. They may have brought hundreds of thousands of people out onto the streets, but this is a highly controlled form of dissent. It relies on the traditional tactics of rallies and A-to-B marches which we saw during the Iraq war, and which have repeatedly failed to stop the bloodshed. You often have the same speakers – many of them national politicians – making the same statements month after month, which means that the crowds don't get to hear about alternative methods of activism. They don't get to learn about direct action, which the NGO-ised Palestine solidarity movement considers beyond the pale. As a result, people who were initially very energized

by the issue have become less engaged; they haven't been given any clear direction. I know that not everyone is going to be able to take direct action, but if say 100,000 people attended a march, it would only take 5% or even 1% of them to shut down most Israeli weapons factories across the country. Right now, with Israel ripping up the ceasefire and continuing the slaughter, it's time for the movement to adapt.

*But to effect meaningful change don't you need a mass movement of some kind, rather than relatively closed and secretive groups of activists who are willing to risk prison sentences?*

We think that a diversity of tactics is necessary. The energy of the protests could have been harnessed more effectively; their participants could have been properly mobilized. But the point is that no mass movement is going to succeed if its main emphasis is on convincing the political class to stop supporting the Zionist regime. Unfortunately, the political class is immovable. Putting it at the centre of your strategy means you get sucked into a respectability politics which goes nowhere. That's exactly what we've seen over the past eighteen months. Whereas if you take an approach that isn't based on trying influence the government, you can actually empower people – you can show them that protest isn't just symbolic, that it can achieve real results.

*How do you understand the UK's increasingly authoritarian response to the movement – charging Palestine protesters with terrorism offences, sending police to raid their homes, detaining critical journalists, and so on? Isn't your direct-action strategy vulnerable to this kind of repression?*

When we founded Palestine Action, we were under no illusions about the likely response from the state. Now that we have started to make real gains, we've seen the extent to which the British government is imbricated with the Zionist regime – and willing to crack down on its own citizens to protect a foreign weapons manufacturer. But the crucial thing is to make sure that this assault does not have a demobilizing effect. At moments of heightened repression, the number of people willing to join the movement often increases, and authoritarianism ends up backfiring. On top of this, there is the question of organizational form. By being security-conscious and working in small groups, we can make it difficult for the authorities to respond to individual actions by targeting the movement as a whole – such that Palestine Action can continue to grow, even in hostile conditions.

*What about the prospect of organizing workers in the factories themselves?*

We take a very critical stance on this. Elbit have their own intelligence cell which reports on Palestine Action every couple of weeks. Its workers are routinely spying on our activists to minimise disruption. The factories tend to hire former IDF soldiers and others who are

embedded in the military apparatus; most of the senior managers are sent over from Israel. As for those on the shopfloor, if they haven't left their jobs this long into the genocide then frankly there isn't much hope of winning them over. Elbit has released videos which show its workers describing themselves as 'civil soldiers' who are proud to be arming the regime. So the question is, if they consider themselves soldiers, can we consider them potential comrades? This isn't the same as the dockers and factory workers who struck to deprive Pinochet of arms in the early 1970s. These people aren't auxiliaries for the military supply chain, they are at its core. Change has to come from the outside.

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*Read on: Lindsey German, [‘Ukania and Palestine’](#), Sidecar.*