

Israel Is the Real Problem

By [Media Lens](#)

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Elite power cannot abide a serious challenge to its established position. And that is what Labour under Jeremy Corbyn represents to the Tory government, the corporate, financial and banking sectors, and the 'mainstream' media. The manufactured 'antisemitism crisis' is the last throw of the dice for those desperate to prevent a progressive politician taking power in the UK: someone who supports Palestinians and genuine peace in the Middle East, a strong National Health Service and a secure Welfare State, a properly-funded education system, and an economy in which people matter; someone who rejects endless war and complicity with oppressive, war criminal 'allies' such as the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

In a thoroughly-researched [article](#), writer and academic Gavin Lewis has mapped a deliberate pro-Israel campaign to create a 'moral panic' around the issue of antisemitism. The strategy can be traced all the way back to the horrendous Israeli bombardment of Gaza in the summer of 2014. A UN report estimated that 2,252 Palestinians were killed, around 65 per cent of them civilians. The death toll included 551 children. There was global public revulsion at Israel's war crimes and empathy with their Palestinian victims. Support rose for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement (BDS) which campaigns 'to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law'.

As Lewis observes, BDS came to be regarded more and more as a 'strategic threat' by Israel, and a campaign was initiated in which Israel and its supporters would be presented as the world's real victims. In the UK, the Campaign Against Antisemitism was established during the final month of Israel's 2014 bombardment of Gaza. Pro-Israel pressure groups began to bombard media organisations with supposed statistics about an 'antisemitism crisis', with few news organisations scrutinising the claims.

In particular, as we noted in a [media alert](#) in April, antisemitism has been 'weaponised' to attack Corbyn and any prospect of a progressive UK government critical of Israel. Around this time in Gaza, there were weekly 'Great March of Return' protests, with people demanding the right to reclaim ancestral homes in Israel. Many were mown down by Israeli snipers on the border firing into Gaza, with several victims shot in the back as they tried to flee. [According](#) to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, a total of 155 Palestinians were killed in the protests, including 23 children and 3 women. This is part of the brutal ongoing reality for Palestinians.

Recently, much media attention has [focused](#) laser-like on the International Holocaust

Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, including 11 associated examples. Labour adopted 7 of these examples, but dropped 4 because of their implication that criticism of Israel was antisemitic. As George Wilmers [noted](#) in a piece for *Jewish Voice for Labour*, Kenneth Stern, the US Attorney who drafted the IHRA wording, has spoken out about the misuse of the definition. It had:

‘originally been designed as a “working definition” for the purpose of trying to standardise data collection about the incidence of antisemitic hate crime in different countries. It had never been intended that it be used as legal or regulatory device to curb academic or political free speech. Yet that is how it has now come to be used.’

Examples of the curbing of free speech cited by Stern in [written testimony](#) to the US Congress include Manchester and Bristol universities.

In an [interview](#) on *Sky News* last weekend, one pro-Israeli commentator stated openly that the aim is to push Corbyn out of public life. As *The Canary* [observed](#), Jonathan Sacerdoti, a former spokesperson for the Campaign Against Antisemitism (mentioned above) was:

‘clear that his motivation for wanting Corbyn gone is, in part, opposition to his position on Israel.’

Lindsey German, national convenor of the Stop the War Coalition, [reminds](#) us of something crucial that the corporate media has been happy to downplay or bury:

‘We should not forget either that the Israeli embassy was implicated in interfering in British politics last year when one of its diplomats was recorded as saying that he wanted to “bring down” a pro-Palestine Tory MP, Alan Duncan. While he was sent back to Israel in disgrace, the matter went no further – disgracefully given that this was blatant interference in the British political system.’



In 2017, an *Al Jazeera* [undercover sting operation](#) on key members of the Israel lobby in Britain had [revealed](#) a £1 million plot by the Israeli government to undermine Corbyn.

German continued:

‘Are we seriously supposed to imagine that this was a maverick operation, or that there is no other attempt to influence British politics, especially when both Labour and Conservative Friends of Israel organisations have strong links with the embassy? The present ambassador is Mark Regev, the man who was press spokesman in 2009 when he defended the killing of Palestinians through Operation Cast Lead, and who has defended the recent killings of Gazan Palestinians by Israeli forces.’

For shared elite interests in Israel and the UK, there is much at stake. Historian and foreign policy analyst Mark Curtis [highlights](#) ‘the raw truth’ rarely touched by the corporate news media:

‘The UK’s relationship with Israel is special in at least nine areas, including arms sales, air force, nuclear deployment, navy, intelligence and trade, to name but a few.’

Indeed, arms exports and trade are increasingly profitable to British corporations doing business with Israel. Moreover, senior government ministers have emphasised that the UK-Israel relationship is the ‘cornerstone of so much of what we do in the Middle East’ and that ‘Israel is an important strategic partner for the UK’. As Curtis notes:

‘The Palestinians are the expendable unpeople in this deepening special relationship.’

A Shameful Outburst

Unsurprisingly, then, the Israeli lobby have been trawling through Corbyn’s life, trying to find past incidents they can highlight as ‘support’ for the ludicrous and cynical claim that he is ‘soft’ on antisemitism or even himself antisemitic. Hence the [manufactured controversy](#) of Corbyn hosting an event in 2010 during which Auschwitz survivor Hajo Meyer compared Israel’s behaviour to that of Nazi Germany.

An *Independent* [editorial](#), titled ‘Corbyn has been found wanting on antisemitism – now he must act’, asserted that he was ‘a fool to lend his name to this stunt’. It was:

‘such an egregious error of judgement that Jeremy Corbyn, an extraordinarily stubborn man, has had to apologise for it.’

Under a photograph of Corbyn sitting at the 2010 meeting with Meyer, *Times* political correspondent Henry Zeffman [said](#) that:

‘Corbyn has led Labour into a nightmare of his own making. The veteran left-winger will never recant the views on Israel that he formed over decades in the political wilderness.’

In the *Daily Mail*, the [caption](#) to the same 2010 photograph of Corbyn sitting with Meyer led with the word, 'Offensive'.

And on and on it went in the 'mainstream' media.

Adri Nieuwhof, a Netherlands-based human rights advocate and former anti-apartheid activist, was a friend of Meyer, who died in 2014. In an article for *Electronic Intifada*, she [wrote](#):

'The 2010 Holocaust Memorial Day event took place the year after an Israeli assault on Gaza [Operation Cast Lead] that killed more than 1,400 Palestinians and injured thousands more.

'Meyer was very upset by the assault because Palestinians were trapped in Gaza due to the blockade on the territory that Israel imposed starting in 2007.

'He could not help but compare the situation of Palestinians trapped under Israeli occupation and bombardment with Jews caged by the Nazis in ghettos like the Warsaw Ghetto.'

She added:

'Those attacking Corbyn today have no restraint and no shame. They will even call a man who survived Auschwitz and lost his parents in the Holocaust an anti-Semite if they believe that is what it takes to shield Israel from consequences for its crimes.'

Nasty abuse flung at the Labour leader has even come from supposed colleagues. Last month, rightwing Labour MP Margaret Hodge [called](#) Jeremy Corbyn 'a fucking anti-Semite and a racist'. The corporate media gleefully lapped up her outburst – the *Guardian* moved swiftly to grant her space to [declare](#) Labour 'a hostile environment for Jews' – and stoked the '[Labour antisemitism row](#)' for weeks afterwards, with over 500 articles to date according to our ProQuest newspaper database search.

Two days ago, *Jewish Voice for Labour* delivered a [letter of complaint](#) to the BBC, condemning a 'lack of impartiality and inaccuracies' in its reporting of Hodge's allegations against Corbyn. Her accusations were 'repeated numerous times without denial or opposing views' by BBC News. Moreover, Hodge's assertion that she represents the entire 'Jewish community' has been allowed to pass unchallenged.

Trashing A Dedicated Anti-Racist

Last month, the UK's leading Jewish papers – *Jewish News*, *Jewish Chronicle* and *Jewish Telegraph* – all carried the [same front page](#) on 'the community's anger over Labour's anti-Semitism row'. They had taken this unprecedented step because of:

'the existential threat to Jewish life in this country that would be posed by a Jeremy Corbyn-led government. We do so because the party that was, until recently, the natural home for our community has seen its values and integrity eroded by Corbynite contempt for Jews and Israel.'

These outrageous claims were rejected by Stephen Oryszczuk, foreign editor of *Jewish News*. He [told The Canary](#):

‘It’s repulsive. This is a dedicated anti-racist we’re trashing. I just don’t buy into it at all.’

He made three vital points:

- 1) Jeremy Corbyn is not an antisemite, and the Labour Party does not represent an ‘existential threat’ to Jewish people
- 2) The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) definition of antisemitism threatens free speech, and Labour was right to make amendments
- 3) The ‘mainstream’ Jewish media is failing to represent the diversity of Jewish opinion

The corporate news media itself is undoubtedly ‘failing to represent the diversity of Jewish opinion’. Worse, it has, in fact, been a [willing accomplice](#) in promoting and amplifying the pro-Israel narrative of a ‘Labour antisemitism crisis’. Consider a recent powerful [piece](#) by Manchester Jewish Action for Palestine, published in *Mondoweiss*:

‘As Jewish people in Manchester, England, we resent the despicable racism shown towards the Palestinians by Guardian stalwarts such as Jonathan Freedland, Polly Toynbee, Jessica Elgott, Eddie Izzard, Nick Cohen, Marina Hyde and Gaby Hinsliff among others, all saturating comment sections on mainstream news websites with attacks designed to bring down the UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, and to protect Israel from accountability.’

They added:

‘UK commentators take the morally defunct option of backing right wing mainstream Zionist organisations’ outrageous cries of “anti-Semitism” the moment Corbyn’s Labour get ahead in the polls, or the moment there is a risk of serious public condemnation of Israel’s horrific crimes against the Palestinians.’

The article continued:

‘Why were Palestinians not consulted on the whole debate about Israel and anti-Semitism, when they are the people being slowly squeezed out of existence by Israel? Where are the Palestinian voices in the Guardian?’

Where indeed?

‘We, as Jews, will not mindlessly pretend that protecting the Jewish people and protecting Israel are the same thing, on the hopeless say-so of a crew of establishment hacks at the Guardian.’

The Manchester-based Jewish group singled out one prominent *Guardian* columnist, and former comment editor, for particularly heavy criticism:

'Jonathan Freedland, one of the UK's most effective propagandists for Israel, while giving Palestinians occasional lip service so he and the other liberal elitists can make doubtful claims to "impartiality", has been the most relentless in his attacks on Corbyn. Freedland routinely uses his opinion editorial position in the *Guardian* to do more than most to "strong-arm" the Labour Party into backing the whole IHRA definition, flawed examples and all. It is unsurprising that he would push for the guideline, "claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour" to be included as anti-Semitic trope, given he is on record excusing the crime against humanity that was Israel's foundational act – the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population in 1947/1948.'

One of Freedland's *Guardian* articles that the group must have had in mind was published last month under the title, '[Yes, Jews are angry – because Labour hasn't listened or shown any empathy](#)'. Leon Rosselson, a children's author and singer-songwriter whose Jewish parents were refugees from Tsarist Russia, [argued](#) that the article:

'is a devious, dissembling, dishonest piece of special pleading that shames both Freedland and the *Guardian*.'

Earlier this month, Corbyn himself had a [piece](#) in the *Guardian* in which he wrote:

'I do acknowledge there is a real problem [of antisemitism] that Labour is working to overcome. [...] We were too slow in processing disciplinary cases of antisemitic abuse, mostly online, by party members. And we haven't done enough to foster deeper understanding of antisemitism among members.'

A *Telegraph* [editorial](#) typified the corporate media's reaction to Corbyn's article:

'he respond[ed] with Soviet-esque institutional lethargy... just the latest in a long line of obfuscations that betray a central fact: Labour's leader is unhealthily obsessed with Israel, and tainted by association with fanatics.'

Corbyn cannot do anything right in the eyes of the corporate media. As Rosselson [said](#):

'Corbyn concedes and Corbyn apologises and the more he concedes and the more he apologises the weaker his position becomes and still the pressure grows and the attacks continue because this is not really about antisemitism and definitions but about getting rid of Corbyn or undermining him to the point where he is powerless.'

Sadly, the Labour leader has failed to properly address this relentless and vicious campaign, focusing instead on trying to fend off accusations of antisemitism. By sticking within this narrative framework set up by the powerful Israeli lobby, a twisted framework that can only be maintained with corporate media connivance, he and his colleagues have made a serious mistake. Asa Winstanley [put it](#) bluntly back in March:

'Jeremy Corbyn must stop pandering to Labour's Israel lobby.'

Winstanley pointed out that the campaign has been going on for years, and he expanded:

'Too many on the left seem to think: if we throw them a bone by sacrificing a few token "extremists," the anti-Semitism story will die down and we can move on to the real business of electing a Labour government.'

'But years later, Labour is still being beaten with the same stick.'

'Any close observer of Israel and its lobby groups knows this: they cannot be appeased.'

Other commentators have made the same point. An *OffGuardian* [article](#) in April, titled 'Corbyn should learn his lesson: compromise with the devil is not an option', observed:

'Corbyn seems to think a few little compromises will get him accepted in the mainstream media. It pains me to say it, but this is fundamentally untrue. You can't compromise with someone who wants nothing but your total destruction. Hopefully Corbyn has learned this lesson by now.'

Sadly not, it appears. A *Morning Star* [editorial](#) correctly observes that Corbyn and his advisers:

'fail to appreciate the ruthlessness of his opponents or the unrelenting nature of their goals.'

Earlier this week, Winstanley published an [article](#) revealing yet another element of Israel's intense campaign against Corbyn: the use of an app to promote propaganda messages via social media accusing Corbyn of antisemitism. The app is a product of Israel's strategic affairs ministry which 'directs Israel's covert efforts to sabotage the Palestine solidarity movement around the world.'

As Jonathan Cook cogently [explains](#) on his website:

'Labour is not suffering from an "anti-semitism crisis"; it is mired in an "Israel crisis".'

To those who bemoan that Corbyn and his team are not sufficiently 'media-savvy', that he has not done enough to present himself as 'PM material' via the press and television, David Traynier has written a strong [rebuttal](#). Two essential facts need to be understood, he says: first, the corporate media 'filter' and distort the news as described by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in their '[propaganda model](#)' of the media, introduced in 'Manufacturing Consent'. Second, journalists and editors are themselves subjected to a 'filtering' process as they rise up the career ladder. They are selected for positions of ever-increasing responsibility only if they have demonstrated to corporate media owners, managers and senior editors that they can be trusted to say and do the 'right' things; even think the 'right thoughts'. As Chomsky famously [said](#) to Andrew Marr, then the young political editor of the

Independent and now with the BBC:

'I'm sure you believe everything you're saying. But what I'm saying is that if you believed something different, you wouldn't be sitting where you're sitting.'

In short, says Traynier:

'the idea that a socialist party simply needs to manage the press better is a nonsense. The corporate media is not there to be won over, it can't be "managed" into giving Corbyn a fair hearing. In fact, once one understands how the media works, the burden of proof would rest with anyone those who claimed that it wouldn't be biased against Corbyn.'

Despite the intense campaign against Corbyn – and perhaps, in part, *because* of its obviously cynical and manipulative nature – many people are perceptive enough to see what is going on. Israel is the real problem.

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