

Neoconservatives and Islamophobes, Not Muslims, Are the Real Threat to British Democracy

The unholy alliance of the two groups attacks free speech, promotes anti-Muslim hatred and seeks to silence all debate on Israel

By [David Hearst](#)

Global Research, February 29, 2024

[Middle East Eye](#) 27 February 2024

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the Translate Website button below the author's name (only available in desktop version).

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Click the share button above to email/forward this article to your friends and colleagues. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

[Big Tech's Effort to Silence Truth-tellers: Global Research Online Referral Campaign](#)

In all the furore that accompanied the House of Commons vote [calling for an immediate ceasefire](#) in Gaza, the substance of the debate has been completely forgotten.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) motion calling for an immediate ceasefire would have embarrassed a Labour leadership that has spent the last five months of [homicidal bombing](#) of Gaza [avoiding](#) saying just that.

The SNP motion was clear, unequivocal and totally in line with public opinion in the British Isles.

The SNP called for an immediate ceasefire without conditions. The Labour motion [handed](#) the [Israeli](#) government a right of veto, by insisting that [Hamas](#) release its hostages as a precondition for the ceasefire to start.

Labour's call for "an immediate humanitarian ceasefire" was no such thing, as it allowed Israel to carry on fighting.

It is an inconvenient fact – both for the Tory and Labour defenders of Israel – that a clear and rapidly growing majority of the British public has had enough of this war. They want an immediate ceasefire.

[Sixty-six percent of Britons](#) support a ceasefire. The same percentage say that Israel should be prepared to enter peace negotiations with Hamas, up five points from November. Only 13 percent think that Israel should continue to pursue the war, and just 24 percent think the

attack on Gaza is justified, a drop of five points.

In other words, the carefully and secretly [choreographed effort](#) to derail a vote on the SNP's motion defied the clearly expressed will of the British people.

The Commons speaker Lindsay Hoyle [excused](#) his decision to break with precedent by allowing votes on three separate motions, thus scuppering the SNP motion, by saying that he had been "very, very concerned about the security of all members".

There then began a brief attempt to turn the MPs that have backed this vile war into victims, into the targets of "Islamist" hate speech. It takes some nerve to turn MPs, who have consistently justified a war which has killed 30,000 Palestinians into the victims of hate speech, rather than expose them as the deniers of genocide.

Orwellian Newspeak

Labour leader Keir Starmer has repeatedly [said](#) that Israel had the right to defend itself, long past the moment when it was clear that the war was directed at the people of Gaza as a whole. He has [repeatedly prevented](#) calls for a ceasefire.

The former human rights lawyer also [defended](#) collective punishment. He clearly said that Israel had the right to withhold water and fuel.

For that comment alone, Starmer, the former director of public prosecutions (DPP), could be prosecuted for incitement to genocide, even though he later [withdrew](#) it.

It takes even more Orwellian newspeak, and an even bigger inversion of reality to turn pro-Palestinian demonstrators into radical Islamists. Particular attention was focused on [Ben Jamal](#), the director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC).

Problem number one: Jamal is not a Muslim. He is a Christian, the son of an Anglican vicar, no less. Jamal does not endorse threatening MPs, but he does defend protesting outside their constituency offices and holding them to account.

Asked at a home affairs select committee in December whether he endorsed the chant "from the river to the sea" Jamal [replied](#):

"I get asked the question: 'Do you tolerate that chant?' We don't tolerate it, we chant it," he said.

"I speak as a Palestinian, this is a chant used by the vast majority of Palestinians. It describes how their rights are deprived across all of historic Palestine, including if they are citizens of the state of Israel or living under military occupation. It in no shape or form seeks the abrogation of anybody else's rights."

The people who think that this chant is a call for genocide of the Jews who live in Israel and the occupied territories should pause for reflection.

Who Is the Extremist?

From the river to the sea has been [used](#) by all Likud politicians since 1977. The Likud manifesto of that year stated:

“Between the sea and Jordan, there will only be Israeli sovereignty”.

So the contention is thus: it is not genocidal when Israeli Jewish leaders use the phrase, but it is genocidal when Palestinians use it, be they Christian or Muslim. In the ever-expanding and uncontested definition of antisemitism, all criticism of Israel is now judged to be antisemitic.

As the events on Friday unfolded, it became clear that this debate was not about reason or justice, but about emotion and smear. It was also evidence-free. Curiously, no threats to MPs are being investigated by the police or the DPP.

The memory of [Jo Cox](#), the MP who was murdered in her constituency in June 2016, was invoked. Little matter that Cox was murdered by a right-wing extremist. [Three women MPs](#) were given bodyguards on the public purse. But here comes problem number two: who and what is an extremist?

If the government of the Communities Secretary [Michael Gove](#) had its way, the definition of extremism would target the right people (Muslim Council of Britain, PSC), but would exclude the wrong people who happen to be fellow members of the Tory party ([Lee Anderson](#), [Liz Truss](#), [Suella Braverman](#), [Robert Jenrick](#)).

Fortunately for democracy in Britain, the courts still function independently of the government, and lawyers have consistently prevented a definition of extremism as expressed in [the Counter Terrorism and Security Bill](#) of 2015 from being formulated. But the mood being created by both sides of the House is not one to balk at fundamental legal difficulty.

Unable to formulate a legally binding definition of extremism, the government outsourced the problem by creating a Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE), headed by people with a track record of partisanship on this issue.

First came [Sarah Khan](#), who tried to rebrand non-violent extremism as “hateful extremism”. Under Khan, the CCE [moved to expand](#) the range of counter-extremism to focus not just on Islamist extremism, but also on the far right and other ideologies. Khan [advocated](#) a “victim-centred approach” to countering extremism.

Then came [Robin Simcox](#), who succeeded her as commissioner for countering extremism. His appointment was [described](#) by Mend, a Muslim advocacy organisation, as “deeply worrying for Muslim communities”. Simcox has crossed the Atlantic to work for right-wing think tanks supportive of attacking Muslim communities.

From 2008 to 2011, Simcox worked at the Centre for Social Cohesion (CSC), which was [described](#) by one of its founders Matthew Jamison, as a “monstrous animal” and a “deeply anti-Muslim racist organisation”.

In 2016, Simcox took up a new role as Margaret Thatcher Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, considered so important to the Trump administration that the New York Times [described](#) it in 2018 as “stocking Trump’s government” with its staff.

In a 2019 [article](#) for the Heritage Foundation, he dismissed Islamophobia as a “slippery concept”. Simcox wrote:

“The ambiguity and confusion around the meaning of Islamophobia allows Islamists to use the term to shut down criticism of their religion and impose an informal blasphemy law on the sly.”

With a track record like this, it is hard to describe Simcox as an impartial arbiter of an issue which is fundamental to community relations in the UK. He is [a cheerleader](#) for the right’s own brand of extremism.

Toxic Potion

Mix an inherent tolerance of hate speech towards Muslims in the Tory party, and the use of advisers who see the electoral benefits in toying with [the great replacement theory](#) – mix all this with the issue of Palestine and you get a truly toxic potion, one that is capable of igniting the fire of community tension and subverting free speech in Britain.

It came to the fore when Lee Anderson told GB News that Islamists had got control of the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan.

“I don’t actually believe that the Islamists have got control of our country, but what I do believe is they’ve got control of Khan and they’ve got control of London... He’s actually given our capital city away to his mates.”

His comments followed an article by former Home Secretary Suella Braverman in the Daily Telegraph, in which she wrote

“the truth is that the Islamists, the extremists and the anti-Semites are in charge now”.

Anderson refused to apologise and the whip was withdrawn, but not without much hesitation.

Sayeeda Warsi, former chairwoman of the Conservative party, told Channel 4 News:

“If these comments were being made and they were antisemitic or homophobic they would have been withdrawn immediately. As Sadiq Khan said, we can not have a hierarchy of racism within political parties.”

But such a hierarchy surely now exists on both sides of the House and make no mistake, it will be used to write new laws. The right will not go away. It will keep on pushing the boundaries, until free speech is lost.

Record weekly demonstrations for Palestine thus become morphed into “mobs”. No Labour representatives at any level are allowed to take part. They are bullied and intimidated by a party leadership that has lost any claim to independence on this question.

Labour provides no opposition to a government that counters and flouts the clearly expressed will of the International Court of Justice that ordered Israel to comply with the Genocide Convention, by continuing to supply Israel with arms.

Peace of Silence

Last week the UK argued at the ICJ that legal proceedings should be put to one side to allow

political negotiations on a Palestinian state to proceed.

As if on cue the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [torpedoed the UK's argument](#) by claiming that Israel's security needs would be incompatible with a Palestinian state.

"I will not compromise on full Israeli security control over all the territory west of Jordan – and this is contrary to a Palestinian state," Netanyahu said in a post on X.

Once again the UK has lined itself up behind negotiations that can not lead anywhere under this Israeli leadership or any other. The proponents of the status quo have only one state in mind: Israel.

So the question is this: who are the real democrats: the MPs inside parliament or the demonstrators outside? Who represents the British people better on this issue? And who is subverting British democracy? The Palestinians whose families are being butchered in Gaza or the unholy alliance of neoconservatives and Islamophobic racists, seeking to skew and criminalise all debate on Israel, until none exists in this country at all.

And which of the two camps supports international law?

The speaker Lindsay Hoyle is neither, but he bows to bullies. He [reneged](#) on his promise to the SNP to allow a second vote on their ceasefire motion. Peace will not be restored in the conflict by giving Israel free rein.

But a peace of sorts could be imposed on the streets of London. It will be the peace of silence. Is that what Britain has become?

*

Note to readers: Please click the share button above. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

David Hearst is co-founder and editor-in-chief of Middle East Eye. He is a commentator and speaker on the region and analyst on Saudi Arabia. He was the Guardian's foreign leader writer, and was correspondent in Russia, Europe, and Belfast. He joined the Guardian from The Scotsman, where he was education correspondent.

The original source of this article is [Middle East Eye](#)
Copyright © [David Hearst](#), [Middle East Eye](#), 2024

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [David Hearst](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca