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London as a Case Study

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Chapter 2:

Delegitimization in London: From Margins to Center-Stage

42. **The historical British nexus with the Palestine issue: The UK harbors a prevalent sense of historical responsibility** for the current state of affairs in the Middle East, and particularly for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The unique association is rooted in the historical British presence in the Middle East and its role in legitimizing the idea of the Jewish homeland through the Balfour Declaration (11/1917), which made London the 'hub of legitimacy' for the Jewish homeland in the early 20th century.
43. **Three more recent societal dynamics have turned delegitimization from a marginal phenomenon to an increasingly mainstream agenda.**

The evolution of the British Muslim community towards Israel

44. **From ambivalence to radicalization** – The majority of British Muslims emigrated from the Indian subcontinent and, as such, viewed the conflict over Kashmir as far more pressing and emotionally charged than that of Israel-Palestine. However, international and geopolitical events – including the wars in Bosnia and Iraq, as well as the Second Palestinian Uprising (2002-04) – precipitated a rise in British identity politics¹⁵ and transformed the role of mosques for second-generation Muslim immigrants.¹⁶

Various Islamist groups have played a prominent role in the radicalization of the Islamic community towards Israel over the past 20 years. Leading examples include those affiliated with the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and the East London Mosque,¹⁷ and those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the Finsbury Park Mosque, which possess strong links to the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB).¹⁸

¹⁵ See Kenan Malik, **From Fatwa to Jihad, the Rushdie Affair and its Legacy** (Atlantic 2009): Some contend that identity politics in Britain helped foster more tribal Muslim communities and create space for militant Islam.

In addition, the British Government's response to the 9.11 and 7.7 bombings are also believed to have brought the more radical Islamist tendencies into the UK mainstream.

¹⁶ The rise in Saudi-funded, Wahhabi-oriented mosques sharply contrasted with the more moderate unpoliticized Islam of first-generation British Muslims. See Ed Husain in **The Islamist**. See also Martin Bright, "[When Progressives Treat with Reactionaries, The British State's flirtation with radical Islamism](#)", **Policy Exchange** 2006.

¹⁷ On Jamaat-e-Islami in the UK, see Habibi, [Harry's Place](#); Christopher Barder, [Under the Surface](#).

¹⁸ More on the connection between MAB and the Muslim Brotherhood see David T [Harry's Place](#).

45. **A wave of Arab immigration in the 1990s contributed to the radicalization of the British Muslim community toward Israel.** Specifically, several leading activists and thinkers – including Abu Hamza, Omar Bakri Mohammad, and Abu Qatada,¹⁹ as well as former Hamas operatives Mohammad Sawalha and Zaher Birawi (see Chapter 5) – immigrated to London and fundamentally influenced the Muslim community's anti-Israel agenda.

The British radical left: Why Israel?

46. **The British radical left finds its new South Africa.** The collapse of the South African apartheid regime precipitated a search for a new issue to provide a focal point and meaning for the anti-Imperialist struggle. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict became a convenient issue with which to fill this vacuum.²⁰
47. **The radical left rejects the concept of the Jewish people's right to self-determination or associates its realization in the State of Israel with imperialism and colonialism.** It leads the global assault on Israel's legitimacy by developing a targeted ideology and *modus operandi*, and implementing it (see [Eroding Israel's Legitimacy in the International Arena](#)). Its leading groups are the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Socialist Action, Stop the War Coalition (STWC), and the Respect party. One of the most dominant pro-Palestinian groups, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), draws its ideology from the radical left and specializes in entrenching its positions, campaigns, and language within the mainstream (See chapter 4).
48. **Anti- or post-Zionist Israelis and Jews** represent a relatively small group that serves as a 'kosher stamp' for delegitimization. Many live and work in London. Prominent examples include Ilan Pappé, Haim Bereshith, Gilad Atzmon, and the Neturei Karta sect.



Neturei Karta at the GPU Conference 2010 (Taken by Eran Shayshon)

¹⁹ Melanie Philips, *Londonistan*, (Gibson Square 2006) and Michael Gove, *Celsius 7/7* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2006); Steven Simon, meanwhile, termed London "the 'Star Wars bar scene' of international terrorism." See: [Washington Post](#), 10/07/05. See also Rachel Briggs and Jonathan Birdwell, "[Radicalisation among Muslims in the UK](#)", *Micron Policy Working Paper* 5/7/09; Salma Yaqoob, "British Islamic Political Radicalism," *Islamic Political Radicalism: A European Perspective*, Ed. Tahir Abbas, (Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

²⁰ British civil society prides itself on sponsoring activities to support oppressed peoples, and perceives itself as having constituted the center of boycott movement against South Africa's apartheid regime. Several people we spoke to claimed that this historical memory has facilitated the rise of movements promoting the tool of boycotts against other countries, most notably Israel.

From *Kibbutz* to *Kibbush*: Inversion of the British liberal and progressive elites

49. **From *Kibbutz* (model society) to *Kibbush* (occupation)** – In the past, Israel was associated in the eyes of the European left with attempts to build a model society, embodied in the *Kibbutz*. In recent years it is associated with the reality of occupation, the *Kibbush*.

Although anti-Zionism has always existed in some form within the ‘mainstream left,’²¹ **generational changes have led to a significant negative revision of attitudes towards Israel.** These trends include opposition to American power; the cultural dominance of the West; the use of military force, and nationalism;²² and support for international institutions, international law, and human rights.²³

The perception that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were a mistake has solidified this negative revision.²⁴ It is further reinforced by recent events in the Middle East, most notably the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead, and is exacerbated by the perceived absence of progress in the political process between Israel and the Palestinians.

50. **The British liberal elite inversion co-evolves with a trend prioritizing individual rights over communal rights.** An emphasis on individual human rights over national communal rights strengthens the logic of the one-state narrative. Such a perspective downplays the importance of the right of both Palestinians and Israelis to self-determination.

²¹ See Rory Miller, [British Anti-Zionism Then and Now](#) and a lecture by Colin Shindler, [The Road to Utopia: The Origins of Anti-Zionism on the British Left](#)

²² See Robert Cooper, **The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-first Century**, (McClelland & Stewart 2005); Robert Kagan, **Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order** (Vintage 2003); Paul Berman, **Power and the Idealists** Soft Skull Press (2007). Also, **EU Council President Van Rompuy: The Time of the Nation State is Over** in Yoram Hazony, [Jerusalem Letters](#), 11/2010.

²³ See [Interview with Colin Shindler](#), **Jewish Chronicle** 10/28/09: The dominant narrative of the ‘Old Left’ (those who grew up around the time of the Second World War) was that of fighting Fascism in the form of Nazi Germany. Those who grew up in the post-war world, meanwhile, had as their dominant memory the process of decolonization, Vietnam, and apartheid, and thus became heavily anti-imperialist.

See also Gove **Celsius 7.7**, “Instead of history being viewed as a matter of class conflict, it was increasingly seen as an anti-colonial, anti-Western process. The place of the proletariat in the affections of the left, as a group onto whom fantasies of revolution could be projected, was assumed by the non-Western peoples of the globe. In place of Rosa Luxembourg and Vladimir Lenin, the icons of the struggle became Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara.”

Some also contend that the erosion of the memory of the Holocaust, which facilitated support for the young state in its early years, is contributing to a rise in opposition to Israel.

²⁴ This is enhanced by a the notion of British historical responsibility for the Middle East conflict and links to a wider historical guilt felt regarding Britain's role regarding the country's imperialist past.

51. **Broad perspective: Most Brits don't care** – It is important to emphasize that despite the trends described, polls show that most Brits are ambivalent or indifferent towards the Middle East.²⁵ Moreover, the British Government's policy towards Israel has been relatively balanced when compared with other European countries.

However, anti-Israel sentiment holds disproportionate influence because of the extent to which it is increasingly pervading the mainstream of liberal elite opinion influencers in London, and as a result of the increasing sophistication of its London-based purveyors in achieving global influence.

52. **The 'pragmatic' one-staters** – As mentioned, delegitimizers have blurred the lines between their agenda and criticism of Israel's policies to convince liberal and progressive circles to support their campaigns, and even to reject Israel and Zionism and support the one-state narrative. However, by and large, their approach vis-à-vis Israel is pragmatic and not ideological: They do not deny the right of the Jewish people to self-determination, but support the one-state narrative because they see it as a viable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

²⁵ In fact, according to polls presented by MFA Brand Israel Project Director Ido Aharoni and Rick Nye of Populus, Israel seemingly enjoys a better image in British public opinion than the Palestinians.