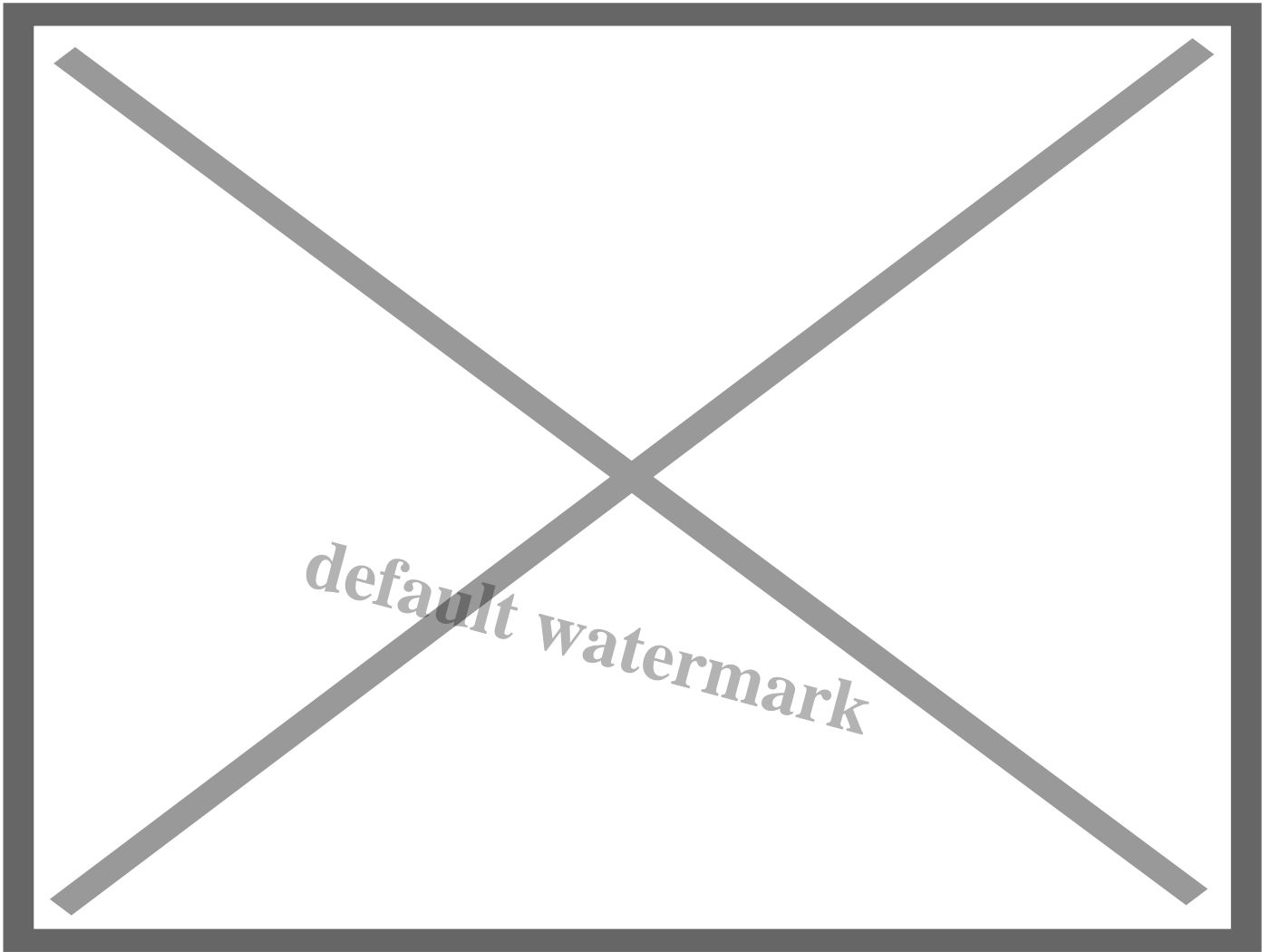




British police arrest and charge 7 over 'Globalise the intifada' signs

Description

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British police have charged seven people for holding signs saying [“globalise the intifada”](#). This comes after Keir Starmer [asked police forces](#) to prosecute people using the phrase back in December 2025.

Keir Starmer called the phrase an example of “extreme racism”. However, the reality is that the British state is just reacting to Israel being under pressure – this time, by oppressing the Arabic language, specifically, the word “intifada”.

Intifada

The term intifada ([نِيفَادَا](#)) [comes from the Arabic](#) root n-f-á, which means “to shake off,” “to rise up,” or “to rid oneself of something burdensome”. In modern Arabic, the term has been used to describe uprisings, revolts or popular movements against injustice and domination. Importantly, the word itself [does not](#) inherently denote violence; rather, it signifies a collective act of resistance or refusal.

The phrase became popular globally because of its association with the history of Palestine, particularly the First Intifada from 1987 to 1993. This uprising emerged because of Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza after 1967.

The First Intifada [consisted](#) of mass civil resistance: strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, refusal to pay taxes, and community self-organisation. At the time, it was widely understood by human rights organisations as a popular grassroots revolt against an illegal military occupation.

The Second Intifada, from 2000 to 2005, was triggered by increasing IOF violence and its extensive use of live ammunition against Palestinian demonstrators. Human rights organisations documented the IOF's widespread use of lethal force against unarmed protesters.

Armed resistance was the Palestinians's response to, rather than an initiation of, violence. Importantly, armed resistance is perfectly legal under [international law](#)

As a result, in some Western media outlets and political discourses, the term "intifada" became narrowly associated with violence and terrorism. However, this removes it from both its broader semantic meaning and the political context of military occupation. Crucially, this was not the dominant way that Arabic speakers viewed or used the term.

Arabic speakers also widely use the word "intifada" for other uprisings, protests, and anti-authoritarian movements. The phrase is not exclusive to Palestine, intrinsically tied to armed struggle.

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Free speech

Now, the British Prime Minister is essentially attempting to [further criminalise](#) free speech and political protest by banning the phrase. Why? because the British government is complicit in Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Police forces started treating the phrase as self-evidently antisemitic. Of course, this is not because a group of world-class linguists have debated the case and come to a conclusion, as you might expect. It's simply because the political mood [demands it](#)

As Jamal Awar [previously wrote](#) for the *Canary*:

antisemitism has once again been shamefully weaponised to justify the repression of Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular.

After the [Bondi Beach attack](#) the Metropolitan Police and the Greater Manchester Police announced that chanting the phrase could lead to arrest. They did not create or cite a new law, and did not clarify a legal threshold. Instead, the cops relied on that age-old police tactic "vibes and fear."

Expert opinion

Recently, Dr Abdul Bashid Shaikh, a lecturer in Islamic Studies, and Mustapha Sheikh, a professor of Islamic Thought and Muslim Societies, both from the University of Leeds, published a paper on the term 'intifada'. Before publication, over two dozen well-known scholars read and endorsed it.

Their expert opinion maintains that:

there is no evidential basis for treating references to intifada in these contexts as encouragement of terrorism or violence. Academic analysis demonstrates that attempts to conflate the term with jihadist violence represent a category error that collapses distinct political, historical and ideological phenomena.

They also state that claiming the phrase is antisemitic is purely political, rather than racial or religious. This is reinforced by the fact that many Jewish individuals and organisations participate in these demonstrations, and they explicitly reject that the term is antisemitic. The paper added:

interpretation of the term as inherently antisemitic likewise cannot be sustained without abstracting it from its linguistic, historical plurality and social context.

They conclude:

On this basis, and consistent with established principles of UK public order jurisprudence, the use of the term intifada in the circumstances examined falls within the domain of lawful political expression that democratic societies have traditionally sought to protect. To construe it otherwise would require a decontextualised and speculative reading of political speech, with significant chilling implications for freedom of expression and the legitimate articulation of dissent.

Western narrowing through a 'counter-terror' lens

In the context of Palestine, the intifada was not just a one-off uprising, but an 'institutionalized condition of collective resistance'. It was a shared political formation.

However, Western media has narrowed and redefined the phrase through the lens of counter-terrorism and public order. This means they have removed its linguistic roots and used it as a proxy for violence or terrorism.

It has turned a political descriptor into a presumed threat, meaning police now treat it as inherently suspect and dangerous regardless of context, intent or accompanying conduct. Of course, this plays right into the hands of Israel and Zionists around the world, who will do anything to criminalise Palestinian resistance.

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