

We Can't Appeal To The Oppressors Anymore

Interview with Huda Ammori from Palestine Action, from Millennials Are Killing Capitalism

Millennials Are Killing Capitalism

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Contents

Part One: 'We Can't Appeal to the Oppressors Anymore'	3
Part Two: 'A Duty To Confront The Institutions of Imperialism'	5
Part Three: 'Your Movement Has Embraced A Direct Action Approach'	7
Part Four: 'We Are Accountable To What We Set Out To Do'	11
Part Five: 'To Proliferate This Struggle'	15

Part One: ‘We Can’t Appeal to the Oppressors Anymore’

J: Welcome to Millennials Are Killing Capitalism. This is Jay. In this episode, we interview the co-founder of Palestine Action, Huda Ammori. For years, Ammori has organized against British complicity in the colonization of Palestine and against British support for the Israeli colonial apartheid regime in historic Palestine. Palestine Action is an organization born out of that struggle, one that recognizes the need to take direct action. Their core campaign is the campaign to shut Elbit down. Elbit Systems is Israel’s largest privately owned arms manufacturer. Its largest single customer is the Israeli Ministry of Defense.

In this episode, Ammori shares some of her organizing history, her experience exhausting the modes of redress available through lobbying and protest, and the rationale behind Palestine Actions targeting of Elbit Systems. It is noteworthy that while Palestine Action has targeted Elbit in the UK, that there are a number of Elbit systems facilities in the US. And that in addition to the deplorable and brutal violence that they enact on Palestinians, they are also a major contractor for the US Border Patrol and components of the US Mexico Border Wall as well. This is a great conversation about an important ongoing campaign and we hope folks will listen in for ways that they can act in solidarity and consider some of the tactical and strategic considerations Ammori talks about as well, for other struggles that they’re a part of.

It’s important to note, of course, that the British legal system is different from the US legal system. Obviously, nothing that is discussed here should be considered legal advice. But the general point that Ammori makes about the difference between the legal and military framework the Palestinians are subjected to in Palestine versus the legal systems within the imperial core is an important strategic consideration for movements that seek to be in solidarity with people in Palestine, and for other internationalist movements as well. Make sure to check out Palestine Action’s website and follow them on social media to stay current with their campaign and their legal cases, and to look for ways to support and get involved. Now, here is our conversation with Huda Ammori from Palestine Action.

J: Welcome to the podcast. For starters, I think it’d be useful, since we’re talking to a global audience here, to just say a bit about what Palestine Action is and the type of actions it has undertaken. And maybe before doing that, just briefly introduce yourself as well to our audience.

HA: Thanks for having me on. My name is Huda Ammori and I’m a co-founder of Palestine Action and I am based in Britain. But I have Palestinian and Iraqi heritage. So Palestine Action is a direct action network that aims to end British complicity with the colonization of Palestine. Specifically, our main and basically only campaign is to shut Elbit down. Elbit Systems is actually an Israeli arms firm. It’s Israel’s largest arms firm, and they were formed in 1966. And the reason they were formed was in order to arm the Zionist regime and to ethnically cleanse and dominate the indigenous population of Palestine. The Palestinian people and the weapons that they make are actually marketed as battle tested. The reason that they market it as battle tested is because they often use the captive population of Gaza, who have been under a brutal blockade for over 15 years, where the majority of the population are children and also the majority are refugees who’ve already been displaced from other parts of Palestine. And often when Gaza is being attacked and it’s constantly under attack by the occupier, Elbit Systems use this as an opportunity to market its weapons and basically test them on the people of Gaza.

This kind of gives it a competitive, sickening edge in the global arms trade. They build these weapons then here in Britain and other places across the world, including America and in Israel,

and then export them to other repressive regimes across the world. We know that they are used in the occupation of Kashmir, that they have been used in Afghanistan, Iraq and many other places, which I'll go on to. But some of the technologies they build and what they're kind of notorious for is their drones, combat military drones that they make. And they supply 85% of Israel's military drone fleet. And these drones are used to constantly surveil the people of Gaza, but also in other parts of Palestine. They're constantly under surveillance and it's a way of the regime basically entrenching its occupation over the people there. But they are also used to attack and are armed drones, which actually, even though it wasn't really a secret, Israel only recently admitted that these drones have indeed been armed for over a decade. The thing is with these drones is that they often require someone who is very remote from the place, very remote from Gaza, who basically is operating behind a computer screen, completely dehumanizes the process of apartheid, which I think is already dehumanizing, but it's basically someone behind a screen getting to decide who lives or dies.

And what we have seen is that in these attacks there is very high massacre of civilians in those areas, but of Palestinians in general when they are using these drones in particular, they also make 85% of their land-based equipment. So, things for their Merkava tanks, which have been used to shell Palestinians, they bought a company called Israeli Military Industry Systems in 2018, which means that they are basically the sole provider of small calibre ammunition. So, the bullets that we see routinely used to kill Palestinians are again being made by Elbit Systems, as well as anything you can imagine in terms of a weapon used, because it is Israel's largest arms firm. But with Elbit we see how these technologies are developed in Palestine and then used across the world to repress people, including in the US. The apartheid wall that they built in Palestine, basically as a way of keeping Palestinians divided and stealing more land. We see that they're using the same technology on the US Mexico wall. Elbit Systems got that contract precisely because they had already built a similar wall in Palestine. We also see how these drones are used by the British authorities, to surveil and stop migrants from seeking refuge in countries like Britain.

So really, Elbit is an arms company that gains and profits from the oppression of Palestinians and the oppression of people across the world. And they managed to benefit from being able to build their weapons in places like Britain, America, Australia and across Europe and even places like now Brazil, etcetera. But in Palestine Action, we recognize that Britain has been complicit in the colonization of Palestine for so long. Myself and many others had made previous attempts at trying to end this, from lobbying politicians to petitions being signed by over a million people, calling for sanctions – routinely ignored. Seeing the mass mobilizations and the protests that happen whenever Gaza is being bombed or something is happening in Palestine, but there has been no movement whatsoever. And when you see that there is a complete block when it comes to Palestine and Western countries like Britain in terms of their unwavering support for Israel's apartheid regime, because they do benefit from it directly and continue to enable it. So we launched Palestine Action as a way of saying, well, we can't appeal to the oppressors anymore to make the changes that we want to see and if we want to act in solidarity with the Palestinians, then we need to take direct action to shut down Elbit at their factories and offices.

Part Two: 'A Duty To Confront The Institutions of Imperialism'

J: You just touched on it, but on the historical role that Britain has had with regards to Zionism and settler colonialism in Palestine. In the US, of course we also have a very strong role and relationship in terms of ongoing support for Israel's apartheid policies and militarism and occupation as well. But some of our listeners in the US or other parts of the world may not know as much about the British role which is obviously really important. So can you share some of that context as well?

HA: Yeah, definitely. So Britain, basically since 1917, so in 1917 they call him Lord Balfour. I don't think he's much of a lord, but Balfour basically was the Foreign Secretary of Britain at the time and he issued a declaration which they call the Balfour Declaration and he was lobbied by Zionists to issue the statement which basically promised to give away the land of Palestine, to create a Jewish homeland in historic Palestine. And obviously it wasn't his land to give away in the first place, but to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine where the majority of the indigenous population were not Jewish, obviously led to the ethnic cleansing of the majority of the indigenous population. Since that Balfour Declaration happened, British were basically on the ground colonizing Palestine directly in the early 1920s. And my own great grandfather was actually shot and killed by a British soldier at the time when my great grandmother was pregnant. And the British have aided and enabled the Zionist from the very beginning and basically they paved the way for what we call the Nakba. And they did this by training the Zionist militia, by suppressing Palestinian resistance in Palestine and using all sorts of violence against the indigenous population from before 1948. But when 1948 happened, this is what we call the Nakba and it translates into English as the Great Catastrophe. And it was backed by Britain all the way.

And basically the Zionist militia, armed as well by Western governments, went and forced more than half of the population out of their homes. And there were 750,000 Palestinians at that time. They destroyed over 500 towns and villages and basically displaced Palestinians into the corners of their homeland which was later occupied by the Zionist regime. And ever since that day, Britain has been a part of profiting from the colonization of Palestine and enabling it to the point where we see today. They are now hosting companies like Elbit Systems with a vast amount of sites in such a small island, where they are being able to build these weapons which are developed on the Palestinian population. Also, Britain are now buying these weapons after they're developed in Gaza. So, if you're buying the weapons after they've been tested on Palestinians in Gaza, then it just encourages the further occupation and the further blockade of Gaza and Palestine overall. So Britain has been a crucial role in the colonization of Palestine and for us, in Palestine Action, we target the manifestations of that today, which is companies like Elbit Systems.

But we're doing that as well. We're exposing, often the unknown past of British complicity in the colonization of Palestine because you speak to any Palestinian and they will know the name of Balfour, but you speak to an average British person or someone in the US and that's not necessarily always the case. And it just shows it's affected Palestinians to this very day. And it's something that people in the imperial core need to be aware of, how their past and their present day is affecting people across the world. And I think, especially when we are in a time when people are talking more about colonialism, but sometimes often in the past tense, but it never stopped – the colonization of Palestine and Britain's role in it – it just manifested in a different

way. And now we are seeing that through Israel's arms trade which is the main way that they can keep and maintain this domination over Palestinians.

J: Yeah, that's absolutely true. The discourse around Israel and Palestine is always sort of this discourse of a conflict between two ethnic groups, that is not discussed in the terms of what is the actual historical basis.

One of the things that I did in preparation for this interview was read an interview with Palestine Action in an online magazine called *The Commoner* and I will link that when we release this episode, as well, so people can read that. But some of the following questions come up from just reading some of the discussion in that interview.

So, there's a discussion of revolutionary duty that animates the work of Palestine Action. This notion of the importance of people living in the centres of imperialism, having a duty to confront the institutions of that imperialism in ways that can actually make a material impact.

This is something we used to see more frequently, I feel like, in more militant expressions of US anti-imperialist movements and anti-war movements. But we see less and less of it today where often kind of as you mentioned earlier on in some of your earlier work, a lot of the kind of nonprofit opposition or maybe liberal opposition comes through these frames of raising awareness of petitions, of statements of solidarity or perhaps of lobbying efforts as well, right? And that's not to dismiss any of those things, but it's just to sort of say that they operate within a certain sphere.

And another thing that's touched on in that interview is in talking about Palestine Action's formation, it's mentioned that the powers that be in Britain have no interests in supporting the Palestinian struggle because their interests are tied to the Israeli occupation and also to the sort of business interests of companies like Elbit, etcetera. So how did this reality of material interest and this notion of revolutionary duty influence your stance on the type of tactics and overall strategy that you had to use, in terms of being in solidarity with the Palestinian people?

HA: Yeah, I think it's a great question. And to start with, from a personal view, I am Palestinian and Iraqi. My father's Palestinian and was displaced from Palestine among my mom's family, who all live in Iraq. And when you see that the difference that just having a British passport or growing up in this country makes on the reality of how your life manifests. It means that I don't have to struggle from one day to the next, not knowing if my family will be killed or see my father in prison or my brother's shot in front of me, simply for existing as a Palestinian in Palestine. And when you can see that as people in the imperial core, there is no doubt that even though our countries are pretty messed up and quite repressive internally – the comparison between how we live to those in places like Palestine, places where our countries have had like Britain and Western countries and their policies had a direct impact and created that situation. And also, when you realize that the arms companies that are building these weapons often to be used across the world do not build them in front of the people in Kashmir or they don't build them in Iraq and they often don't build them in Palestine or Afghanistan, they will build them in places like Britain, the US. Where we are.

I think that in itself means that you actually have a duty to try and intervene in that process to stop those weapons from being manufactured and sent to be used to imperialize countries across the world. One of the reasons being, because we have an ability to do it, we're physically able to do it. It's often not far from where we're living, where these weapons are being made. And also, I think in terms of complete solidarity and realizing your position in an international sphere, then seeing how we can act here and the consequences we face compared to just existing in Palestine.

For Palestinians, you are on the front line, whether you like it or not. There is really no choice in it. By existing as a Palestinian under Israeli apartheid, you are constantly under an occupation and you're constantly under threat. And for us, in places in like Britain and the US and wherever else, we have a choice to put ourselves on that front line and to act in solidarity with them. But I think if we really want to see a change and we have seen how imperialism has played out in the world, we have all of the facts, all of the reasons to act.

And at the same time, we are aware that the political process in Britain and other places as well, and trying to use facts and persuasion at this point feels redundant. Because I personally believe that the politicians and the government and every successive government right in Britain has been a part of this for 100 years and they're fully aware of what is happening. But they choose to continue to allow Israel to act with impunity when it attacks Palestinians. And when you see that, then you realize something has to change. And if we are serious about wanting to liberate Palestine, and if we're serious about being part of an anti-colonial struggle, then that means that we also need to put ourselves in a position where we are stopping these weapons from being made where we are.

And it's not just a revolutionary duty, it's an opportunity to make a material difference in the world. If people refuse to abide by what society tells you, which is if this company is operating there and you can't touch it, you can't interrupt with it, et cetera, et cetera, and actually, when you realize that they're making weapons in front of you that could be used tomorrow to kill people across the world. What if everyone did that, wherever they were? Then they won't be able to get away with this.

So, I think sometimes when you look at it the opposite way around, not acting can sometimes feel more crazy than acting. And I think it's also just basic human instinct, right? Like, if you see someone about to hurt someone else, whether that be a child or an adult, most people will step, will try to intervene in that process. And it's exactly the same thing. But I think capitalism in general and society can try and remove us from what is happening internationally and we have to reconnect and realize our role.

And I think in particular, when it comes to Palestine, Israel has been able to get away with what it's doing and continue to try and gain power because it doesn't operate in isolation. It needs the support of international governments and it needs the support of these companies to continue to grow in places like Britain, the US, et cetera. And Palestinians are resisting day in and day out, on the ground. But it gets to a point where it also requires international actors to also play their role in dismantling the manifestations that we see. And in Britain, that's very clearly these Elbit Systems factories which are littered across our country, and we can directly intervene and destroy them in many cases and stop them from being able to operate.

Part Three: 'Your Movement Has Embraced A Direct Action Approach'

J: Obviously, as you just sort of alluded to, right, there's an emphasis on the development of direct action approaches in terms of confronting Elbit Systems. Since a lot of our audience is outside of the UK. And I don't really have a great sense either of what coverage has been like in the UK. But can you say a little bit more about some of the direct actions that have occurred? Obviously, we're not asking you to take credit, and I understand there's legal things you probably

won't be able to get into, but what are some of the things that have happened at these Elbit factories and offices?

HA: So, we started in July 2020 and we started by myself and some others continuously storming the headquarters of Elbit Systems, which was in London at the time. And thankfully it has been shut down which we found out a few months ago. So, it took two years to shut that place down and that was just basically walking into an open office and painting, occupying the place and recording it and putting it online. And we found that straight away there were people, there was such an interest in what we were doing, and I think a lot of people were refreshed by the approach and wanted to be a part of that. And ever since that we've just continued to grow and grow.

In terms of the actions, I'll take a place as an example. So, Oldham is in the north of England, near Manchester. People know that and it's one of their bigger factories, was based there and there had been like a local campaign for some years, you know, which involved more things like petitions and lobbying the council and lobbying MPs. It had very committed people involved, but it didn't necessarily manifest in the factory closing down.

When we started Palestine Action, there were numerous actions from people blocking the front doors. Simply by being attached to a lock on, we call it here, or gluing onto the front doors, they can't get into work. We've seen people lock on the caravans and using caravans and vehicles as a way of obstructing the business from opening people climbing onto the roof of these factories. I think what's kind of infamous for Palestine Action is getting onto the roof of these factories. And there are some different advantages to that as well. When you're on the roof of a factory and you cause you're using a sledgehammer to dismantle the air conditioning units, windows, etc, CCTV or whatever, they can't operate and no one works inside. But also, people have used that as an entry point to break into the building and go inside and actually destroy the workings of war from the inside. So there's been a whole array of tactics people are willing to do. There's not always the super hard cost off, there's things in the middle and the lower end. So, it kind of means that more people can actually take part in an action as well.

But often we use red paint, and the red paint is symbolic of the Palestinian blood that has been spilled by this company and blood of many other people. And actually that is quite important, because often these factories are just – you would never guess that it's producing these weapons from the outside, it just looks like a normal building. So, part of the action's main aim is always to disrupt and to stop the production of these weapons and to disrupt them from being able to continue to operate. But also, there is a byproduct effect which exposes the fact that this company exists in these areas in the first place. And an interesting point as well is that in the factory in Oldham, for example, when people had broken inside the site and entered the site, that these companies have contracts with, like the Ministry of Defense in Britain and other companies. And within these contracts, if there was any security breach, they have to contact and let them know that there has been a breach of security in that facility.

So it has a knock on effect as well, where they're having to contact the Ministry of Defense every couple of weeks and say it's happened again. It makes them less likely to be able to continue to gain those contracts. And we saw in January this year that the Elbit factory in Oldham was forced to close down for good. They sold it at a massive loss after buying it ten years before for £15 million. They sold it for £9 million. And it was basically the complete opposite of what their strategy is, which is often to acquire as many businesses as possible and to expand rather than go backwards. So that was our first huge success. But for us in Palestine Action, every moment

and every day these factories are closed or their offices can't operate is a victory in and of itself. But obviously the ultimate victory is when you start to see these places close down.

J: Thank you for sharing all of that. So, another thing that's touched briefly on in that same Commoner interview is decision making. It's mentioned in that article that Palestine Action can't go into a lot of detail here for security reasons. And obviously that's perfectly understandable. But what can you say about how Palestine Action is organized, how it approaches the various questions of organization? For example, what role does autonomous action or organizing have in the movement? And can you say anything about why you all embrace sort of the approaches that you do from an organizational standpoint?

HA: When we started, we deliberately called it a network, which can have quite loose connotations. And one thing that we are definitely try and minimize as much as possible in Palestine Action is bureaucracy, simply because I think many of us have been groups before where it felt like there were more discussions about bureaucratic things rather than action. And so we have an action agreement in Palestine Action, which has ten points, the first one of which is that we are action orientated. And there are many different things within that agreement, such as not talking to the police and things that we agree on in order to be a part of the Palestine Action Network. But overall, we have local groups, groups on the ground who do many different things, from running stalls to events to increasing the words about Palestine Action. And we also operate in working groups, so things like media operate in a working group, and research, and as you can imagine, other things which a direct action movement might need to organize, are organized in that way. And then there's often groups of people who then make the decision.

So when there's an action, those people within that action make those decisions themselves – what type of action they want to do. Being aware of the legal consequences of every different type of action, and planning an action according to that group. But also, people who want to join, who don't have a group, can then be put in touch of like-minded people and form an affinity group, so to speak. But also in Palestine Action, there are many covert cells which are kind of no one knows who they are, only the people inside them know who they are. And often people will do actions which are covert – sending the pictures, et cetera, to Palestine Action for it to be published securely.

We try and think Palestine Action creates an environment where it is geared towards facilitating the actions as much as possible. A key thing for Palestine Action is sustained action. Myself and other people have been involved in direct action in the past against Elbit Systems, but it was, like once a year, it wasn't enough to actually severely damage the company and try and bring them to a full closure. So, our new structure is all about facilitating each other to be able to continue a sustained mode of action against this company, Elbit Systems.

J: I know there have been, and I believe that there are still ongoing, some important legal struggles in this campaign. Obviously, direct action, like what you're talking about, leads to property damage in some cases. It can certainly lead to losses of revenue for the targeted corporation. And indeed, this is part of the point, of course, of such action to make continued operation unsustainable. What can you share? And are there important things that people, like following your work or maybe supporting could do? Because obviously when there's a court case, right, you can do different kinds of support for that as well.

HA: So, we definitely have a lot of court cases in Palestine Action. It does come with the terrain, but actually the backstory to this is before Palestine Action, as I just mentioned about the kind of more sporadic action that was taking place, that for years people were doing these

actions not very sustained and not necessarily causing a high amount of property damage. And no one ever went to trial. Like, people just had their cases dropped. I had mine dropped in 2017, the day before trial, or they were never charged in the first place. Or when things like disclosure was requested for, which is kind of like a request for documents which help your defense in court, then the case would get dropped, which is obviously dodgy in itself. And it became common knowledge that if you took action against Elbit in a way which wasn't too damaging, then you weren't going to go to court because this company did not want to be in court and they did not want their activities scrutinized. So that gave us a kind of higher desire, pushing that dilemma forward.

There is a precedent for this. So, in the north of Ireland, during the 2007 Israel's bombing of Lebanon, nine people from Derry, it's, like, a very pro-Palestine, Irish place, and they went into this factory and just destroyed it, threw computers out the window, and they were called the Raytheon Nine. They went to court and in front of a jury they were found not guilty. And nine women did exactly the same action, or a similar action, went to court and they were found not guilty. And in the end, the company had to leave because A, there were activists who were willing to destroy them and were willing to risk any consequences that followed from that, and B, they had no legal protection because juries which are pulled from the local community weren't willing to convict these activists, and because the company was just an arms company. You know what I mean? It's just like, when you look at the images of what is happening and what they do, it's incomparable.

I think the fact that people get charged with criminal damage in the first place is just – it just shows how upside down this world is in some senses. Like, you face criminal charges and trials for criminal damage against a company, which literally their whole business model is based on the destruction of Palestine and people's lives. Which are much more priceless and windows and buildings – the value does not even compare. And anyone, I don't think anyone with common sense would think that it does.

But anyway, so with Palestine Action, when we started, we were adamant on pushing it out. We wanted to have sustained actions, we wanted to create a dilemma for Elbit, and we wanted to destroy the factory so they couldn't build these weapons anymore. You know, myself and others, in September 2020, we climbed onto the roof of one of these factories with a hammer and pain, and we managed to do quite a lot of destruction to that site. And now we're in a position where there is a lot of court cases that are happening and they can no longer not take us to trial because then they're in a position of, well, if you don't take them to trial, they just keep destroying our sites and then we can't operate in this country.

But also, they have the problem of if we go to trial and we win, then they have no legal protection in this country, either. And so far we have been very successful in the court cases that have happened, most of which have happened at a magistrate's court level, which is like the lower level, and it's basically a single judge who decides your fate. And even there, we have been successful, I think, to date, 15 to 20 people have been acquitted and I think a couple convicted, but those are being appealed and it's been very minor fallout from that. We have been seeking to go to the Crown Court for a long time. The Crown Court is where you have a jury. It's also a place where the chances of getting disclosure requests and forcing the company to disclose certain things which aid in your defence is much higher. The level of scrutiny on Elbit would be a lot higher simply because you are facing a higher risk, but you are trialled by a jury.

And we have seen to date, every single Crown Court case get delayed for over a year. And actually, now we have the first one happening as we speak in London, which is interesting, but there has been in a significant amount of delays when it comes to that. So myself and two others are facing charges of blackmail. There have been over 250 people arrested in Palestine Action and it's not something which is happening to everyone, just the kind of people who were there at the start. And that's kind of a massive overstep by the state, because we don't believe it's right. But, you know, a charge of blackmail – basically they were trying to say that we were blackmailing companies into not working with Elbit by enacting a campaign of direct action against them until they broke those links. And the interesting thing with blackmail is that they can try and put a serious crime prevention order on you, which means after conviction, if you get convicted, they can ban you. They can obviously imprison you – it carries a heavier sentence, but also they can ban you from campaigning for life, anything from signing a petition. They can try and stop you from doing it so you can get recalled to prison. So it's a very obvious political attempt by the state to charge you with that.

But again, that was supposed to happen one month ago and it's now been delayed until November 2023. So for, as you know, the fight continues into the courtroom and, you know, we have full belief that we always stand as the accusers and not the accused, and that we can go into court of our heads held high. Whereas Elbit systems often operate literally behind closed doors, and actually are very nervous when it comes to these court cases. We've seen that they have a note taker, which they're paying, I think, £200 an hour in every court case just to take notes and monitor what is happening in the courtroom. So, it's an ongoing battle. But I think in terms of how people can support, we do use the hashtag '#Elbit isGuilty' to push out these court cases and support for them. Financial support is obviously always welcome. We always get removed from fundraising platforms, because Elbit's friends sue them. So, if people can donate, that's very helpful. But also encourage people to do, if not actions, protest, banner drops, et cetera, where they are in solidarity with this struggle. And if there's a local Elbit site, of course, targeting them would be more than welcome.

Part Four: 'We Are Accountable To What We Set Out To Do'

J: So, beyond those court battles, can you say a bit about the kind of police repression and the greater response? In part, I asked this because obviously the struggle is not at all shy, right, about being in solidarity with Palestine. And I'm interested in terms of something said about this in the Commenter interview as well, whether you think that there's more repression of your movement because it's in solidarity with Palestinians, as opposed to other direct action movements that maybe are about the environment or other issues.

HA: Yeah, definitely. That's been very obvious from the start of the movement. From the start, when we had one of our first public actions, four or five of us were just thrown onto the ground, very violent arrest, crossed in the back, and I'd thrown paint. Literally, it's paint, they can calm down. And we've seen people there who came to that and saw that, and they were from groups like Extinction Rebellion, and they were shocked to see it. I think when you're inside it, though, and you're inside a movement like Palestine Action, even though it's disgusting and shocking, you almost become desensitized to it, in a sense, which is not a good thing at all. But overall, with the police, we've seen things like raids. Very often people get raided. In Britain, the police have a

power, so when you're arrested, they have an ability to search your home whilst you're in police custody. And often in other meetings, they don't use this very much at all. In Palestine Action, they use this about half of the time and it's completely random. Someone could have been sitting in front of a gate and have their home raided and someone could be on the roof destroying their factory and not have their home raided. So it's completely arbitrary.

But what we see is this consistently happening. Anything with, like, Arabic writing, people who have a book of Arabic writing in it will get seized if it's in your home. To prepare for taking action, people are often told to remove your devices and remove anything with Arabic writing on it or your Palestine flags, because they love taking Palestine flags out of people's homes, like it wasn't already evidence that they were acting in solidarity with Palestine. We've seen the police as well, near the start, myself and Richard Barnard, another co-founder, we had our home raided, which we shared with asylum seekers, in solidarity with asylum seekers. And they had raided twice in one day with about 30 offices each time. And Richard was under arrest, I was not. And they confiscated both of our passports. They arrested him for blackmail. That's when that started. And they confiscated my passport as well as his. And this is something you only really see in murder cases or really high-up cases, and it was completely unlawfully done, but they had done that.

We also, myself and Richard, we were stopped at the border under schedule seven, counter-terrorism. It's a power that they have in ports, places where you can travel out of the country or into the country basically. And if you are stopped under this, it means that they can interrogate you and you don't have the right to no comment. If you refuse to answer questions, they tell you you will get charged with terrorism, charged with all sorts. And we were subject to that and interrogated for three or four hours. And this is three months into Palestine Action. It was obvious from the start that they were trying to crack us from the start and intimidate and carry out a campaign of intimidation against people in Palestine Action. But since then, actually, we've had a lot more people join the movement. And there's been kind of like an explosion of people joining the movement since then.

But we haven't necessarily seen the police tactics stop. If anything – there are police stationed outside Elbit factories, one of the Elbit factories, I believe, 24–7, the police are literally outposted from that factory to protect them. We saw them in Oldham during the two week bombing of Gaza. They again had police stationed outside the site. When the bombing in Gaza started in 2021, that's when the police went out there and stayed there night and day to make sure to try and protect that site, because they were aware that that site was complicit in supplying weapons to be used in Gaza. And they were trying to make sure that no-one could stop them from doing that. And obviously we've seen racism from the police. And people in the meeting are very much aware of those things and act in solidarity with one another, when those things happen. But we also don't let it stop us, because we are acting in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Another interesting thing when it comes to police and Elbit, so they had a guy called David Bird, and he was the chief security officer or some label like that. Basically, he was the guy who would deal with Palestine Action, so to speak. And it turned out that he was an ex-chief of that local police force. So, he was a former chief officer, fully aware of what this company was doing, because there had been a previous action before he left the police force pointing out the crime that this company was complicit in. And obviously, probably, he got a higher pay amount from Elbit and left to join Elbit Systems and worked there. Recently, they hired a guy called Martin Kelly. He was working for the police force. It was the same police force that was dealing with

Palestine Action up until middle of 2021. And then at some point between 2021 and the start of this year, he became Chief Security Officer of the company.

So you can see the close ties between Elbit Systems and the police. And we see that manifest in many different ways, but also when it comes to security, Elbit employees – when we started Palestine Action, they had barely any security. They maybe had one security officer at each site. Now they have, like, six security guards at each site. They're ex-military. They're massive, very rough ex-military security guards that we have seen assault people, assault actively in front of the police. When we started this movement, people who are part of it, we are all of the same belief that we do not associate with the police and we do not talk to the police. And the police are not our friends. But the more you do this kind of work, the more that they expose themselves, right? Like, we're trying to stop British complicity, but through it we're exposing just how deep British complicity is with the colonization of Palestine. A private arms company is given so many privileges and opportunities for the police to protect them, over the concerns of normal citizens in this country. And with the full knowledge that this company is complicit in war crime, that we have pointed out publicly numerous times, the facts are there, it's in the public domain.

But at the same time, the fact is that they have to employ 24 hour security guards, right? So that's not just like a day shift, that's the whole 24 hours shift and times that by six. At one site where the workforce is about 30 people, the amount that they're having to pay for security guards, for building fences, CCTV, they're always trying to make it more secure. And it often fails to do that.

But we're squeezing their pockets very thin. Between them having to employ security that they probably don't want to have to pay for, and the fact that they're constantly put out of business. And in addition, even with the state protecting them, they will not be protected. So, for us, it's a matter of time before they are forced out of this country. Because when you're talking about an arms company like that, you hit them in the pockets, you stop them being able to make lucrative profits. And it's just a matter of time before they leave because that's all they care about.

J: Yeah, absolutely.

One of the things kind of with respect to repression and court cases as well, is this discussion that I've seen from Palestine Action about a somewhat more flexible legal framework in the UK than obviously Palestinians can operate under Israeli occupation. Can you say a bit more about your analysis there, and how you sought to use that to the advantage of your movement?

HA: No, I think it's a good question and it raises different points that Palestinians have to go through. For Palestinians, even if you're not necessarily existing in Palestine, it's all automatically resisting. But like, even if you're just going by your day-to-day business, Palestinians are routinely detained and they put them under administrative detention for months at a time, where even without a charge about a trial, you are detained and tortured by the occupier. And then, even if you do go to trial, you're trialed under a military court where it has, I think, a 99.7% conviction rate for Palestinians. Obviously, Israelis go to a civilian court that was under civilian law, but Palestinians are constantly under military law where there is absolutely no justice. Palestinians routinely go on hunger strike as a way to resist their detention and to resist when all other forms of resistance have been taken away from you. You still have your own body.

And I think the strength that we see from Palestinians under the situation they're in and their refusal to capitulate to the occupier and the continued resistance that they enact after 74 years of being under a Zionist regime, is the strongest inspiration you could ever have to be able to resist in a country where we do have a different legal framework, dramatically different. It's in

no way a beacon of democracy like they'd like to paint it out to be. But you can't even compare the consequences you might face for taking this type of action in Britain, even when sometimes there is prison on the line, prison is a risk, and people have been imprisoned in Palestine Action before. In certain cases, even the conditions of the prison, or the sentence you're expecting, or the fact that you're actually going to know when you're going to get out, all of these things – it's a completely different experience.

Yet Britain plays this role in Palestine where they are the oppressor. You know, Britain, Israel are working together as the oppressors. And I think it just reminds us of people here in Britain. It just makes complete sense to act in solidarity, and especially when, as I mentioned before, they're not going to build these weapons in Gaza. I mean, could you imagine? It would be an absolute failure on their part. Why is it that they feel safe in the first place to build weapons in countries like Britain and the US? It's often because they have an ongoing allyship with these countries. Israel calls Britain one of its most strategic allies.

But there comes a point when, if the British government are going to continue, and every single government has been part of this, it's not like, let's just vote for the left party next time and all will be fine. That's complete crap. When it comes to Palestine – when the establishment is not going to liberate Palestine, it won't be persuaded or threshed into it in any way – then it's up to us as people to act and to take direct action to make it impossible for them to continue that complicity. And for us, that means taking down output sites and bypassing the government, which continues to act with Israel.

I have to say that I think as a movement, but also personally, I've been doing activism for Palestine and against the arms trade for many years before doing this type of direct action, sustained direct action and starting Palestine Action. And it was born out of necessity. Every other method – I've been involved in a lobby day, where you lobby 70 MPs and you ask them if you will agree to an arms embargo and it's just complete – the response you get, it's just meaningless. Not one politician in this country has ever closed down an arms factory, but Palestine Action has, and so have the people of Derry who went into that factory and destroyed it. And I think that's something that we're trying to take on to a bigger level than ever before, and really take the power back into people's hands.

J: You sort of talked about this throughout the conversation, but share a little bit about what the feedback has been like for your work. And then, in addition to that, how do you think about accountability for your work? For instance, who do you see yourselves as needing to be accountable to, and how do you seek to hold yourselves accountable?

HA: Yes, it's starting with feedback. We never ask for a response from Palestine directly. But we have seen a mural painted in Gaza. We saw that a few months ago, and I think for all of us, that was just extremely heartwarming and inspiring to see that. And they posted it on a wall in Gaza and it was depicting Palestine Action, kind of stopping the war machine. And we get a strong response from Gaza. Actually, there was a recent action where activists had got into the House of Commons private members, lobby in Parliament in Britain, and there was a statue of Balfour and they managed to deface that statue and there was a letter written in response from Gaza in gratitude of that action.

And again, I think it just goes to show how Palestinians are aware of the oppressor's role and other countries role in their oppression. But it's not often the people in this country know that. And so we have seen a very strong kind of solidarity come directly from Palestine and from Palestinians in the diaspora as well, and obviously many Palestinians in the movement.

But in addition to that, we had after the first month of Palestine Action, there was a meeting between the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs, Benny Gantz, who was Israel's Defense Minister, and Dominic Raab, who was the UK Foreign Secretary at the time. And this meeting was – they had a press release, an Israeli press. And I was trawling through the Zionist press, I saw this statement and it basically was Israel asking Dominic to crush Palestine Action and to stop the direct action movement in its tracks. And I was absolutely buzzing to see that. Because it just showed that we were on the right track, right? If you're not – after doing campaigning for years, and never having such a strong response, to see the Israeli government so scared of the potential of this movement to grow.

And I think the reason that they're often worried about it is because when you're lobbying another person, appealing to a middleman, so to speak, then there's an automatic obstacle to actually achieving your aim. If people, and this is what happened, start taking direct action and take power back into their own hands and go directly to these sites, there is no way that they can try and stop that from being effective. And so that was great to see.

But also in terms of accountability, we are kind of an independent body, a network. I think our main accountability is to our mission statement, which is to end British complicity with the colonization of Palestine, specifically to shut Elbit down. And the Palestinian people are not a homogeneous group – like any other people, right? And often there have been issues because groups try and claim that they are the voice of the Palestinian people, and then actually do things which are counterproductive towards the cause of liberation. So, we are inspired by the Palestinians and we are often in acting in solidarity with them and are in contact with Palestinians on the ground all the time.

But I think ultimately, we are accountable to what we set out to do. We are very focused. That is actually part of our actions agreement. And the reason for that is simple – it's because we want to win, we want to be effective, and we want to get rid of this company. And we're not shy to say that. And actually, putting our resources and putting our people power into a direct target increases our chances of winning against a single target. It makes it more of an achievable aim.

And that if it's successful and you force Israel's arms trade out of a country which Israel calls it's one of its most strategic allies, then not only is it a practical nightmare for the Zionist regime, but politically it sends such a strong message that in a country like Britain, despite the government, people forced it out. And it sends a message to every other company who is complicit in the apartheid regime, that people will not tolerate it. And those are the kind of things that can create a ripple effect.

So I think ultimately, we are accountable to what we set out to do and to keeping each other safe while we do so.

Part Five: 'To Proliferate This Struggle'

J: So, I wanted to bring back something that you talked about a little bit earlier and also bring in a movement that's been going on here in the United States. We had a conversation recently with folks who are involved in the movement to defend the Atlanta forest, which is one aspect of what's been an ongoing struggle to stop the building of this place that activists and community members call Cop City. And similarly, in certain respects, it's kind of a multi-tendency movement. It allows for autonomy of different groups to take different action, sometimes with no coordina-

tion with some kind of centralized group. And its target is this thing called Cop City, which I mentioned, which is this really large I think it would be the largest in the United States, but it's certainly one of the largest, if not police training facility, which would also have a connection to Israeli occupation forces.

In the United States, one of the issues is that a lot of the sort of, quote unquote counterterrorism training or anti protest training that police officers get in the United States is through these training programs or exchange programs that are connected to the IDF or more accurately, the Israeli occupation forces. So, one of the things that those organizers talked about in that conversation is that while protesting or pressuring politicians was one side of struggle for them, or also protesting or boycotting the corporations who were donating to the police foundation to fund this actual building. That's another area that there are other groups of constituents to think about, who may be better targets for pressure campaigns in certain instances. Obviously, this is totally based on the conditions of your struggle. What you're trying to do and your analysis of those things.

In the case of Atlanta, what they talked about a lot was subcontractors. Like, the people who would actually need to do certain components of the work to make this building possible, whether that's contractors who might clear the forest or contractors who might do plumbing or HVAC work or any number of other things. Right. Because it's not just one entity that's going to make something like this possible. And part of their argument was that for some of those subcontractors, if we were using the example of Elbit, Elbit's business model is totally based upon creating arms to harm Palestinians and to be used in other countries around the world. But there could be other people who have contracts or work with them on various things where that might just be one component of their business, right? And so then they have to decide whether that's something that they want to prioritize and take the sort of publicity hit as well as the disruption of their activities.

It's an interesting analysis, round which entities to target and in your struggle, as you mentioned earlier, beyond targeting Elbit head on. And I know this is one of the things that it sounds like has led to this charge of blackmail, but there are some other organizations and companies in their orbit, business partners of theirs that you have targeted. So maybe say a little bit about that approach in your case and whether you think that it's been a helpful strategy, or maybe it's been more of a distraction.

HA: I think it's a really good strategic point to raise and it's something that you can see emulated in different campaigns and it's something that can be used universally, really. So in our example, actually, I'll just cover the charge of blackmail in that relation. So it was for the company, JLL, who were the landlords of Elbit's former headquarters. And in my opinion, the charges are baseless. And it's because these tactics are effective that in order to have a demand as the campaign and some sort of lost potential for the company, whether that's reputation or financial loss, which you could get from a protest or whatever else, then that apparently constitutes blackmail. So I think it's completely baseless.

But the interesting thing about the JLL campaign is that when Palestine Action was targeting the former headquarters in London, it was the two-pronged approach which was directly shutting the headquarters down, often quite simply as well, because it had a really fancy door. It used to have a big canopy over it and nice plants and it looked really nice, or whatever, at the start of the campaign. At the end it was completely broken off. They had to remove the canopy because activists kept climbing on top of it and it was completely destroyed. But it was very easy to shut

the place down because we just had to blockade the front doors and maybe throw some paint on it as an added effect. In addition to that, there was a campaign against JLL – often these companies have offices beyond where your initial target is, which means that more people nationally and potentially internationally can actually be part of that campaign against that site. And in the end, it was an effective approach.

And we've seen in Palestine Action, people target the people who transport the weapons, the trucking companies who do transport Elbit's weapons and export them across the world. The landlords of these companies, where there are landlords, because, of course, some of these sites they own themselves, but there's also suppliers and, like you mentioned, so many different contractors who are involved in enabling them to operate, because no business can operate in isolation. They work by, you know, they've to buy the components from somewhere. Someone's got to apply, give them instruments, someone's got to give them a building and all of these little things.

And like you said, for Elbit, you can't really pressure Elbit just without direct action into just closing their side down, right, because you can't really just be like – you just need to stop existing as a company. They would never just give in to that demand, unless it's done by force, which has been done. But when it comes to other companies, like you said, it's the small part of their business and it's whether that is worth the risk and whether it's worth the loss to the reputation, the financial loss by the type of actions that have been done at those companies. And ultimately, whether they want to advertise their contract with Elbit for their business overall. Obviously, we've seen it before where they have decided to cut ties with Elbit.

Actually, it's quite interesting that there is a factory in Staffordshire, which is in the Midlands of England. To be honest with you, most people in England don't know where it is. It's kind of one of those places, but it's leased out by another company, property company, of course, called Fisher German, and there had been numerous covert actions supported at their office in Birmingham. And after a few months of that, the office had closed down, which was not an intended effect, I don't believe, of those actions against them, but it just shows the level of how effective this is.

We don't know what's happening behind the scenes as well, how much communication there is, how much Elbit is trying to keep them on side and what is happening. But you can imagine the dynamics between them and other contractors. Another example is, there's a company called APPH, and it's actually a subsidiary of a French arms company, which is a supplier to Elbit, and they were targeted by Palestine Action and they were then forced into a position, to call up all of the other companies they worked with and explain what was going on.

And there's then this complex created, where you have arms companies trying to distance themselves publicly or not be as publicly associated with Elbit Systems. We've seen Elbit take down their supply chain off their website in response to these actions. And we've seen, actually, the packaging company that was sending these weapons and exporting them when this action had started – they had removed, they had taken their website down completely, like they were trying to hide what they were doing. And it was like, well, it's kind of already obvious at this point, and I think somebody had archived the website.

So I think it's a great tactic to use and you always have the element of surprise there as well, whereas after doing targeting the same company for two years kind of lose that element of surprise, which can be a powerful element.

J: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Well, this has been a wonderful conversation and I think this gives folks a really good sense of Palestine Action and your analysis, and the ways that you all have been struggling.

HA: It means a lot to be able to get the word out of what we're doing to people in different spaces and in different places.

I'd say if people want to support Palestine Action or follow what we're doing, we're on social media at Pal_Action. We're on Twitter and Instagram. I think TikTok now as well. Facebook took us down quite quickly as well. And also we have our website at palestineaction.org and you can email us at info@palestineaction.org. But I think I just want to add that Elbit is operating heavily in the US and other parts of the world. So, I'd like to encourage people to look into what is happening in their own cities and sometimes something could be right under your nose, and you would have never noticed it until you kind of do that research. And then you can act wherever you are in a different capacity, in a different way.

But I'd encourage people to look at taking direct action, if they're capable, against a war machine. And I truly believe that together we can defeat it. I mean, you can defeat the product of imperialism. That's beautiful.

J: Great. So thank you so much for this conversation, I really enjoyed it. I think our listeners will too and I hope that it will help to proliferate this struggle and similar struggles against imperialism and in solidarity with Palestine directly, of course. Thank you.

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Millennials Are Killing Capitalism
We Can't Appeal To The Oppressors Anymore
Interview with Huda Ammori from Palestine Action, from Millennials Are Killing Capitalism
8 December 2022

<https://millennialsarekillingcapitalism.libsyn.com/we-cant-appeal-to-the-oppressors-anymore-palestine-action-with-huda-ammori>

A transcribed interview with the co-founder of Palestine Action, Huda Ammori, which first appeared on the podcast Millennials Are Killing Capitalism. Palestine Action is a direct action network targeting the arms manufacturer Elbit Systems, which has premises in so-called Australia, including in Port Melbourne and at Fisherman's Bend, as well as partnerships with RMIT and the Victorian government. Transcription by Anon; all errors theirs. Our thanks to MAKC for permission to republish and for their revolutionary work.

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