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Rights Lawyer Gareth Peirce Leads Challenge to Ban on Palestine Action

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Veteran civil liberties lawyer Gareth Peirce, known for defending the wrongly convicted Guildford Four and Birmingham Six, is spearheading a legal challenge against the government's decision to proscribe the activist group Palestine Action under the Terrorism Act 2000, describing the ban as an authoritarian overreach.

Human rights solicitor Gareth Peirce has joined forces with her legal team to contest the UK government's decision to list Palestine Action as a proscribed terrorist organisation. The group, known for direct-action protests against defence firms linked to Israel, was added to the banned list under the Terrorism Act 2000 on 5 July 2025, a move which makes membership, support or even displaying its insignia punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

Peirce, who previously secured justice for the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six, is fronting a judicial review seeking to quash the proscription order, citing concerns that non-violent civil disobedience is now equated with terrorism. She describes the ban as a dangerous precedent that threatens freedom of speech and lawful protest.

The government defended the listing by pointing to Palestine Action's breach of RAF Brize Norton in June 2025, when activists gained entry to an airbase and damaged aircraft engines. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper argued the group's actions constituted terrorism because of the serious damage inflicted on critical military infrastructure.

However, opposition voices have criticised the move as excessive. A coalition of civil liberties groups and politicians, including Baroness Shami Chakrabarti and Amnesty International, has warned that the ban conflates property damage with violent extremism and could stifle peaceful protest. Independent MP Zarah Sultana asserted that the decision risked sketching all anti-war protests as terrorism, warning it could chill democratic discourse.

Around 29 activists, including an 83-year-old retired priest, were arrested at a protest in London's Parliament Square shortly after the ban took

effect, demonstrating growing public concern over the curtailment of civil liberties.

From a centre-right perspective, while acknowledging the government's obligation to guard national security, many believe the proscription goes too far. It sets a risky precedent where non-violent, symbolic protest is criminalised under anti-terror laws, diminishing the boundary between legitimate dissent and genuine extremist threats.

As the judicial process unfolds, ministers must balance the need to protect key infrastructure with fundamental democratic rights. If the courts uphold the challenge, the ban may be overturned, potentially restoring a vital space for robust, non-violent protest in a healthy democracy.