

## **'Damn you Keir Starmer'**

### *Complicit: Britain's Role in the Destruction of Gaza*

Peter Oborne

London: OR Books, 2025, £11.99, p/b

### **John Newsinger**

This is a tremendously powerful book, written with both a determined forensic intensity and a sometimes barely controlled outrage. Oborne, one feels, sometimes just cannot believe what is going on, the enormity of what he has uncovered, the extent of British complicity in genocide and the increasingly authoritarian efforts to cover it up. The combination makes it absolutely compelling reading. In many ways, the book's cover tells us everything we need to know: a picture of a somewhat grim looking David Lammy, then Foreign Secretary, shaking hands with a smirking Benjamin Netanyahu. But there is so much more to explore and learn.

This is not the first time Oborne has subjected the British political class to forensic scrutiny. As long ago as 1999 he published his *Alastair Campbell: New Labour and the Rise of the Media Class*, followed up by *The Rise of Political Lying* in 2005, *The Triumph of the Political Class* in 2007 and *The Assault on Truth: Boris Johnson, Donald Trump and the Emergence of a New Moral Barbarism*.<sup>1</sup> He has also published books on the Middle East and Islam: *A Dangerous Delusion: Why the West is Wrong about Nuclear Iran* in 2013 and *The Fate of Abraham: Why the West is Wrong about Islam* in 2022. And a number of books on cricket. All of these books (except, for me, those on cricket) are worth reading. What is also of interest is that Oborne is, as he himself tells us, very much 'a traditional Conservative'. This was in the August 2025 issue of *Byline Times*, in the same column in which he actually goes on to strongly oppose the removal of the remaining hereditary peers from the House of Lords, arguing that they were preferable to the sink of patronage that it has become! To be fair, he does acknowledge the need for 'root-and-branch

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<sup>1</sup> See my review of *The Assault on Truth* in *Lobster* 81 at <<https://shorturl.at/my9pE>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/81/the-assault-on-truth-boris-johnson-donald-trump-and-the-emergence-of-a-new-moral-barbarism-by-peter-oborne/>>.

reform' of the Lords.<sup>2</sup>

Earlier, in the June issue of the magazine, Oborne acknowledged that we are living in a Britain increasingly dominated by 'oligarchs' and was absolutely scathing about the Starmer government's failure to combat this. Instead, 'his Government has revived and amplified the long-standing Conservative project to wreck the public domain'. The super rich oligarchs, he tells us, 'have purchased our political parties and poisoned British democracy' and he wonders whether it is even possible to fight back against this.<sup>3</sup> Just how desperate the situation has become is shown by his column in the September issue, where he actually admits to being 'fascinated by the new party led by Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana' and praises Corbyn having 'been proven correct when the foreign policy establishment – the Foreign Office, the RUSI, Chatham House, MI6 etc – have led us to calamity in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and elsewhere'.<sup>4</sup> Oborne's political trajectory is fascinating and one can only look forward hopefully to a future book on Starmer, Morgan McSweeney and co. But what of his *Complicit*?

*Complicit* opens with a discussion of the case that South Africa presented to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing Israel of genocide. As he points out, the evidence included statements from Israeli military leaders, government ministers and officials openly proclaiming their genocidal intentions, including the Heritage Minister, Amichai Eliyahu, urging that they 'must find ways for Gazans that are more painful than death'. The International Court of Justice's acceptance of the South African case was mostly ignored by the British media; as was British complicity with arms sales and intelligence.<sup>5</sup> As for the then Conservative government, to Oborne's obvious disgust, the Foreign Secretary, David Cameron – oops! sorry, Baron Cameron – forcefully condemned the decision to take Israel to the ICJ.

He goes on to examine the cross-party support for Israel, with the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, initially even endorsing the Israelis starving the Gazan

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<sup>2</sup> 'Peter Oborne's Diary', *Byline Times* (August 2025), p. 9. In this same column he damns the BBC's coverage of Gaza, noting that it 'has come to treat Israeli pressure groups with greater respect than the UN', that 'its reporting staff are in despair' and that its senior management were 'To quote Robert Burns poem To a Mouse, they are "wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous beasties". They have disgraced themselves, betrayed journalism, and palpably unfit to lead any media organisation, and certainly not the BBC'. Of course, it was upsetting Donald Trump that was to cost at least some of them their posts, not something as trivial as misreporting the Gaza genocide!

<sup>3</sup> 'Peter Oborne's Diary', *Byline Times* (June 2025), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> 'Peter Oborne's Diary', *Byline Times* (September 2025), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example,  
<https://www.declassifieduk.org/britain-sent-over-500-spy-flights-to-gaza/>.

population. He soon backtracked. Presumably denying it was happening was more politic than openly supporting it! As Oborne points out, 'Starmer's support for the Tories meant that when it came to Gaza, government and opposition merged', and this was even though it was 'in defiance of majority British opinion'. And, of course, the Far Right rallied to the Israeli cause, not just the likes of Nigel Farage and Richard Tice, but also that fascist entrepreneur Tommy Robinson.<sup>6</sup>

In Chapter 2 Oborne dissects the British media's embrace of the Israeli version of events. As he puts it:

Large sections of the media repeated the lies promoted by Israeli and British politicians. Some produced fresh lies of their own. They twisted their reports in favour of the Israeli cause. For a long time, reports of Israeli atrocities appeared either in muted form or not at all. Hamas atrocities were exaggerated or fabricated. Dissident voices were suppressed. Across much of the media spectrum a general implicit consensus emerged: Israelis count and Palestinians don't.

He points out that the Israel lobby has for many years gone after journalists who have reported honestly on the misery and horrors that the Israelis have been inflicting on the Palestinians, but what we see today is the media embracing the Israeli narrative like never before. The contrast with the reporting of Russian conduct in the Ukraine is stark.

Chapter 3 on the British reporting of the 7 October attack is absolutely essential reading for everyone concerned with Gaza. What we are confronted with is a 'triple alliance' of government, opposition and the media, all intent on covering up and thereby condoning genocide. But what of the massive demonstrations in support of the Palestinian cause that have repeatedly filled the streets of London and many other cities? These marches were 'remarkably peaceful' and so in order to discredit them, the media resorted 'to fantasy'. Oborne quotes Camilla Tominey, writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, a paper he used to work for, describing how 'for the first time in my life I'm beginning to fear for the future of Britain'. The streets were being taken over by 'thousands of people who are not only happy to be useful idiots for Hamas but who revel in their anti-Semitic ideology'. The people demanding a ceasefire and opposing genocide were demonised, while the pro-Israeli Far Right were welcomed aboard.<sup>7</sup>

Chapter 6 looks at the pro-Israel lobby, focussing in particular on the Conservative Friends of Israel. Once again a devastating indictment. Here his

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<sup>6</sup> *Complicit*, pp. 4, 8, 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Complicit*, pp. 35, 77, 79.

traditional conservatism briefly resurfaces with a celebration of Margaret Thatcher who was always 'prepared to call out Israeli war crimes'. But she supported the murdering torturer Augusto Pinochet when he visited Britain in 1998 (she actually sent him a bottle of the finest Scotch whiskey); and perhaps less well-known, in 1983 she had sent the SAS to help train the Khmer Rouge. What was crucial, of course, was doing what was acceptable to the United States. Pinochet was very much their man and the Americans had requested the British help train the Khmer Rouge because the US Congress would have exploded if it had come out that American troops were training them. Similarly, her criticisms of Israel were, at that time, in line with US policy. Today, this is no longer the case and British governments, whether Conservative or Labour, always subordinate themselves to the US. Oborne goes on to provide a forensic demolition of Keir Starmer, 'a purported human rights lawyer', both when he was in opposition and then when he became Prime Minister. And yet, this reader was left somewhat disappointed. Oborne's demolition of the Conservatives is more thorough-going and relentless than his take-down of Starmer. One can only hope that this will be remedied by a future book devoted to Starmer and Starmerism.<sup>8</sup>

Oborne devotes Chapter 9 to the media attempts at claiming that nobody was starving in Gaza. Once again, a tremendous forensic demolition that demands reading. He looks at the various efforts of the likes of Danny Finkelstein, Melanie Phillips and Howard Jacobson at either minimising or denying the starvation. But my personal favourite is Michael Gove, – oops! sorry, Baron Gove – the former Tory minister and currently editor of *The Spectator*, in January 2025 calling for the IDF to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize! This crass obscenity has not stopped him from being installed as one of the Orwell Prize judges for 2026, indeed chair of the panel judging the reporting of homelessness. Such are the workings of the British establishment: you could not make it up.

Chapter 10 is an excellent examination of how the British media misreported the rioting of Israeli football supporters in Amsterdam in November 2024 when 'Reuters, Sky News and the BBC presented footage of Maccabi supporters attacking Dutch people as if it showed attacks by Dutch racists against Jews'. For some reason, the British media did not report these same Maccabi fans enthusiastically singing 'Why is school out in Gaza? There are no children left there'.<sup>9</sup>

The last chapter looks at Trump's so-called peace plan and the fake cease-fire, at Starmer's problems dealing with the erratic Trump and at 'ballooning'

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<sup>8</sup> *Complicit*, pp. 127, 149.

<sup>9</sup> *Complicit*, p. 230.

British arms sales. In the last three months of 2024, Oborne tells us, British arms sales to Israel were worth more than 'the years 2020-2023 combined'. He reports an event in May 2025 when a celebration of the founding of Israel was held at the British Museum. It was attended by Kemi Badenoch, Nigel Farage and the comedian Jimmy Carr, among others. But also present was the Minister for Defence Procurement, Maria Eagle, who spoke to the gathering, celebrating 'the British-Israeli alliance' and the RAF surveillance flights that were assisting IDF operations in Gaza.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, this was not intended to leak out, but it did, further undermining the Starmer government's credibility.

Which brings us to the problems that the massive pro-Palestinian protest movement poses for the Labour government. Oborne looks at the way the government has harassed and smeared the protestors, but, interestingly, does not discuss the banning of Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation. This has led to the arrest of hundreds of peaceful protestors for simply challenging the validity of the ban by holding up placards saying 'I oppose Genocide. I Support Palestine Action'. This is apparently a terrorist offence! And there are at the time of writing eight Palestine Action prisoners on hunger strike. This Labour government's embrace of a creeping authoritarianism has to be challenged. And it seems that the ban on Palestine Action was not even something the Security Services actually supported, but rather involved the government bowing to pressure from arms firms and their insurers and attempting to appease Donald Trump. The book could have done with a chapter devoted to this.

Which brings us to the point where Oborne has clearly had enough and devotes nearly three pages to damning those he holds responsible for British complicity in the Gaza genocide, starting with 'Damn you Keir Starmer'.<sup>11</sup> Great stuff.

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His latest book is *Chosen by God*:

*Donald Trump, the Christian Right and American Capitalism*,  
published by Bookmarks. <<https://bookmarksbookshop.co.uk/>>

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<sup>10</sup> *Complicit*, p. 238.

<sup>11</sup> *Complicit*, pp. 258-261.