

The Prohibition of Maccabi Tel Aviv Supporters from the UEFA Europa League Match against Aston Villa

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Preface by Lord John Mann

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Foreword

**By Lord Mann of Holbeck Moor
HM Government's Independent Adviser on Antisemitism**

Since the attacks of 7 October 2023, Jewish communities in the United Kingdom have lived with a heightened sense of vulnerability. Antisemitic incidents have risen sharply, with Jewish schools, synagogues, community centres and cultural events having increased security.

The responsibility of the state in such moments is clear: Jewish people must be protected. Antisemitism must be confronted without hesitation, and public authorities must ensure that Jewish communities can participate fully and visibly in public life – including cultural and sporting life – without intimidation, exclusion, or the sense that their presence is itself a problem to be managed.

It is precisely because this responsibility is so serious that decisions taken in the name of safety must be held to the highest standards.

This report addresses one such decision: the prohibition of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters from attending the UEFA Europa League fixture against Aston Villa. It was not a routine policing judgement. It was a rare, exceptional, and far-reaching action – the pre-emptive exclusion of an entire group of supporters, defined not by individual conduct but by association. Such decisions demand rigorous scrutiny, clear evidence, and transparent justification.

Public authorities have an unquestionable duty to protect life, prevent disorder, and maintain public safety. That duty is especially acute in periods of heightened tension, when global events reverberate on Britain's streets. But the strength of a democracy is tested not when decisions are easy, but when pressure tempts institutions to substitute assumption for evidence, or precaution for principle.

This report does not minimise public order concerns. It does not dismiss the operational pressures faced by police commanders or event organisers, nor does it deny the reality of antisemitism, political extremism, or the potential for disorder. On the contrary, it takes those threats seriously – because serious threats require responses that are lawful, proportionate, and rooted in fact. What this report asks, calmly and methodically, is whether the threshold for such an extraordinary restriction was met.

This matters not only because of what happened on one matchday in Birmingham, but because of what it signals for the future.

When access to public sporting life can be withdrawn from an entire group without clear, specific, and demonstrable necessity, the implications extend far beyond football. For Jewish communities in particular – already experiencing heightened insecurity – such decisions are not experienced in isolation. They resonate with wider concerns about belonging, visibility, and equal treatment under the law.

Intent is not the same as impact. Even where no discriminatory motive exists, public authorities must account for foreseeable consequences. A decision that communicates

exclusion, even inadvertently, carries a burden of justification that cannot be satisfied by caution alone.

This report is not an exercise in hindsight or blame. It is a factual review, grounded in evidence, comparative practice, and established principles. Its purpose is constructive: to ensure that future decisions of this nature are taken with greater rigour, better intelligence validation, and clearer accountability.

Britain has a long tradition of policing complex, high-risk events while upholding equality and individual responsibility. That tradition should be strengthened, not eroded. Particularly at moments when minority communities are under pressure.

The conclusions and recommendations set out here deserve serious consideration. They go to the heart of how we protect Jewish communities *without isolating them*, how we manage risk *without normalising exclusion*, and how we maintain public confidence in the fairness of our institutions.

Those balances are not optional. They are fundamental.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Mann". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Executive summary

Outline:

1. This report finds that the decision to ban away supporters from the fixture was reached through a flawed risk assessment process.
2. We argue that the prohibition was not justified by the risks as assessed, and it represented an unnecessary departure from ordinary policing practice, which we believe would likely have been sufficient to secure the match.
3. The Parliamentary Select Committee similarly concludes that the decision-making process was flawed. However, it maintains that the prohibition was proportionate to the level of risk, even if that risk had been more rigorously assessed.
4. Our analysis considers a further, key point. A central weakness in the decision-making process was the failure clearly to specify the nature and source of the risk.
5. If the primary risk came from away supporters themselves, then exclusion may have been justified. But if the principal risk derived from anti-Israel protestors, boycott activists, and antizionist actors seeking to disrupt or attack the match, then banning the away supporters risked punishing those who were being threatened and who did not themselves constitute a significant threat.
6. In such circumstances, the appropriate response would have required consideration beyond technical policing calculations. If there was a significant antisemitic threat, a policy priority might have been to mobilise sufficient police resources to defend the match, the visiting team, and their supporters rather than excluding them.
7. The decision-making process appears to have overestimated the risk posed by Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters, in part through a misreading of the Amsterdam precedent and perhaps through reliance on politically committed sources of advice. It may have given insufficient weight to risks arising from boycott activism and to the risk of antisemitic violence of the kind that occurred in Amsterdam.
8. The process did not engage in a serious way with institutions or individuals from the Jewish community either locally or nationally, or with HM Independent Advisor on Antisemitism. Doing so would have given it a better chance of avoiding the mistakes that it made in understanding the precedent, possible alternatives and the predictable impact of the away fans ban on Jewish communities.
9. If there was a significant antisemitic dimension to the threat environment, the risk assessment process did not identify or articulate it clearly.

Purpose and scope

This report examines the decision to prohibit supporters of Maccabi Tel Aviv from attending the UEFA Europa League fixture against Aston Villa on Thursday 6th November 2025 at Villa Park in Birmingham, UK.

Commissioned and published by the London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism (LCSCA), this report sets out the evidential basis, decision making process, and the outcomes of decisions made.

This report also considers the issues of consistency within United Kingdom public order policing procedures, equality obligations, and established practice in football and major event management in relation to this event.

The decision

Aston Villa Football Club is in Birmingham, the second largest city in the United Kingdom, and located in the West Midlands. Their home stadium is called 'Villa Park.' Ahead of the proposed fixture, West Midlands Police, in consultation with Aston Villa Football Club and the Local Authority (Birmingham) Safety Advisory Group, determined that supporters of Maccabi Tel Aviv would not be permitted to attend the fixture. The decision was publicly justified on the grounds of anticipated public order and security risks, with reference made to recent violent disorder involving Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters in Amsterdam, and to the broader geopolitical context following the events of October 2023.

Significance

The prohibition constituted a blanket, pre-emptive exclusion of an entire away supporter group. Such a measure is exceptional in UK contexts, with high risk football fixtures ordinarily managed through intelligence-led policing, targeted interventions, and enhanced stewarding. Blanket prohibitions raise important issues of:

- Necessity and proportionality in public order decision making
- The use of collective characteristics as proxies for risk
- Consistency with equality principles and specific equality consequences
- The precedent set for future sporting events involving politically sensitive teams or minority supporter groups

The decision therefore has implications beyond the individual fixture, including for confidence in policing, equality before the law, and the participation of Jewish supporters in public sporting life.

Core findings

This report considers the following findings:

- **Exceptional measures:** the prohibition represents a departure from standard UK practice for managing high risk football fixtures, involving collective exclusion rather than targeted risk mitigation
- **Evidential limitations:** the decision relied substantially on generalised risk assessments, in part relating to events that occurred outside the UK, rather than on publicly evidenced, match-specific intelligence indicating an imminent or unavoidable threat at Villa Park
- **Necessity not demonstrated:** the material available does not demonstrate that less restrictive, established, more routine policing measures were insufficient to manage identified risks

- **Proportionality concerns:** the blanket nature of the prohibition extended beyond individuals or groups presenting a known risk, capturing all Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters irrespective of conduct
- **Match day outcomes:** the fixture proceeded without significant public order disorder or security incidents. The risks anticipated in advance of the match did not materialise
- **Consistency:** comparable fixtures involving clubs associated with supporter violence or political sensitivities have generally been managed through more routine measures of enhanced policing and targeted controls, rather than exclusion of all away supporters
- **Equality implications:** the prohibition had the effect of excluding a whole class of predominately Jewish and Israeli supporters, raising concerns regarding collective punishment and differential treatment in public event access; there was concern that the exclusion was precipitated by stereotypes relating to Jews and Israelis

Conclusions

1. Whilst there may have been legitimate public order concerns, the evidence available does not demonstrate that a blanket prohibition was required to prevent serious disorder, nor that more routine, less restrictive measures were insufficient; these would have included working with UEFA (the governing body of European Football) and its established procedures and criteria for preventing and responding to football hooliganism, including racist behaviour and chanting
2. The prohibition was disproportionate to the risk identified. The absence of significant disorder on matchday highlights that efficacy does not always mitigate necessity. The scale of the restriction exceeded what was reasonably required to achieve the stated public safety objective
3. The evidential foundation for the decision was limited in specificity and relied on extrapolation from external incidents rather than on credible, match-specific intelligence. This falls short of the standard ordinarily applied in UK public order policing. Lord Mann of Holbeck Moor, HM Government's Independent Adviser on Antisemitism and Maccabi Tel Aviv had both publicly stated, prior to the prohibition decision being made, that Maccabi's 'ultras' would not be present at the match, but the decision to ban all away fans appears to have assumed that the 'ultras' would be likely to pose a significant threat
4. The understanding of the external incidents that fed into decision-making was partial
5. The approach adopted was inconsistent with police standard operating procedures, which emphasise intelligence-led, proportionate approaches. The decision raises concerns in relation to equality principles, particularly where nationality or perceived group identity appears to have operated as a proxy for risk

Recommendations

This report makes a series of recommendations intended to strengthen future practice without impinging on operational independence. They include:

1. Clarifying the evidential threshold required for blanket supporter prohibition
2. Working alongside UEFA in accordance with its consistent practice and criteria

3. Strengthening intelligence validation and challenge within SAG processes
4. Improving contemporaneous record keeping for high impact decisions
5. Embedding earlier, and more balanced, local community engagement
6. Explicitly integrating equality and perception impacts into risk assessments
7. Considering antisemitism as an equality consideration, including Israel-related antisemitism, using the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism as a framework.
8. Improving balance and accuracy in public and internal communications.
9. Establishing clearer escalation and oversight mechanisms for politically sensitive fixtures.

These recommendations seek to ensure that public safety objectives are pursued in a manner that is evidence-led, proportionate, and consistent with the principles of equality and public confidence.

Introduction and terms of reference

Introduction

The Community Security Trust, the Jewish communal institution concerned with security for the Jewish community in the UK, found that antisemitic incidents in the UK rose to a record 4103 in 2023.¹ This persisted into 2024, which showed 3528 reports were made, making it the second highest annual total ever reported.²

The 7th October attack on Israel and the ensuing conflict have had a direct impact on the level and character of antisemitism in the UK. There is particular concern relating to the safety, inclusion and participation of Jewish individuals in public life. Sporting events occupy a distinctive position within this context. Football matches, in particular, are major civil gatherings that combine mass attendance, strong group identities, and heightened emotion. Decisions taken in relation to the access, policing, and risk management at such events therefore carry significance beyond sport alone, touching on broader questions of public order, equality, and confidence in public institutions.

This report examines one such decision: the prohibition of supporters of Maccabi Tel Aviv from attending the UEFA Europa League fixture against Aston Villa at Villa Park. This report does not seek to provide a general assessment of antisemitism in the UK, nor to adjudicate geopolitical disputes or political positions related to Israel and Palestine. The wider context is considered only insofar as it formed part of the background against which the decision was taken, or was explicitly relied upon by decision makers in assessing risk.

An LCSCA report

This report was commissioned and published by the London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism (LCSCA).

LCSCA is an independent scholarly community focused on the analysis of antisemitism as it manifests in contemporary political, social, and cultural contexts.

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to examine the decision to prohibit supporters of Maccabi Tel Aviv from attending the UEFA Europa League fixture against Aston Villa at Villa Park, and to assess that decision against established standards of public order management and equality in the United Kingdom. In particular, this report seeks to examine:

- How the decision was reached, including the roles of relevant policing bodies, the football club, and local authorities

¹ CST Antisemitic Incidents Report, 2023

² CST Antisemitic Incidents Report, 2024

- The nature and quality of the evidence relied upon in assessing risks
- Whether the decision met established tests of necessity and proportionality
- Whether it was consistent with UK public order policing standards, equality and non-discriminatory principles, and established practice in the management of high risk sporting events

This report is not intended to determine criminal liability, to review match officiating or UEFA sporting decisions unrelated to supporter access, or to assess the conduct of individuals except where relevant to public order considerations. Its focus is on decision making, standards, and outcomes, rather than attributing blame or intent.

Scope and limitations

This report considers the period leading up to the Aston Villa fixture, including the contextual factors and incidents cited as relevant to risk assessment; the decision making process itself; events on matchday; and the immediate aftermath of the fixture.

The primary focus of this report is the UK context. Incidents occurring outside the UK – including those involving Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters elsewhere in Europe – are considered only insofar as they were referenced by decision makers or formed part of the rationale for the prohibition of supporters. This report does not seek to provide a comprehensive account of those incidents beyond what is necessary to understand how they were interpreted and applied in this case.

The analysis is based on publicly available material. The authors have not had access to confidential intelligence assessments and does not have statutory powers to compel evidence or testimony. Where relevant information is unavailable, this is noted. This report does not seek to pre-empt, interfere with, or comment upon any ongoing investigations, proceedings, or internal reviews.

Methodology

This report is based on a structured review of documentary and publicly available sources, including:

- Statements, guidance, and publicly available materials issued by police forces relating to public order policing and risk assessment
- UEFA regulations, communications, and relevant governance material
- Public statements and communications issued by Aston Villa Football Club
- Parliamentary material from select committee proceedings, debates, and questions
- Contemporaneous media reporting from the UK and international sources

The approach adopted is analytical and evidence led. A clear distinction is maintained between information available to the relevant authorities at the time the decisions were made, with retrospective assessment informed by subsequent events. This report avoids speculation and confines itself to conclusions supported by the material reviewed.

Legal, policy, and ethical framework

The analysis of this report is grounded in the established legal and public policy principles governing public order, equality, and the participation in civic life within England and Wales.

In relation to public order policing, this report is informed by the principles that decisions should be intelligence-led, taken in pursuit of a legitimate aim, and meet the tests of necessity and proportionality.

In relation to equality and non-discrimination, this report is informed by the principle of equality before the law and the requirement to avoid direct or indirect discrimination. Particular attention is given to the risk of collective exclusion or punishment based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, or perceived group identity, and to the importance of individual behaviours, rather than group affiliation, in the assessment of risk.

In relation to sport and public participation, this report recognises football matches as major civic events and an important part of public and cultural life. Restrictions on access to such events engage considerations of freedom of association and participation, and require clear and compelling justification where they extend beyond targeted or individual measures.

These principles provide the framework against which the decision under review is assessed.

Independence and objectivity

This is an independent report, and its content is determined by its authors alone and their understanding and assessment of the evidence. It recognises the responsibility of public authorities, police forces, and event organisers to protect public safety and to prevent disorder. At the same time, it applies established standards of evidence, necessity, proportionality, and consistency in evaluating the decision taken in this case.

This report is intended to assist policy makers and policy organisations in understanding the implications of the decision under review and to contribute to clarity and consistency in future decision making in comparable circumstances. It is also hoped that it will inform public discourse about this event and related ones in the future, in particular via journalists and other opinion-formers.

Context: Maccabi Tel Aviv and the significance of the case

Maccabi Tel Aviv Football Club: sporting history and status

The club's identity is rooted in the wider Maccabi sporting movement, which has promoted physical education and sporting participation amongst Jewish communities worldwide. It still organises and champions amateur and youth sport in Jewish communities across the world.

Maccabi Tel Aviv is one of the oldest and most successful football clubs in Israel, winning the Israeli Premier League title in the 2024-2025 season. Founded in 1906, the club has played a central role in the development of organised football in Israel and has been a dominant presence in the Israeli Premier League since its establishment in 1999. Maccabi Tel Aviv has won multiple titles and domestic trophies, being widely regarded as one of the country's flagship clubs. It operates and functions as a professional club comparable in structure, governance, and commercial orientation to other professional football clubs across Europe.

Within Israeli football, Maccabi Tel Aviv is generally characterised as a mainstream club rather than one defined by ideological or sectarian affiliation. Its domestic rivalries are primarily sporting rather than political in nature, and its support base spans a broad range of social, ethnic, and political backgrounds. It has, and has long had, Arab players and Arab fans, both Christian and Muslim.

European participation and international profile

Since Israel's admission to UEFA,³ Maccabi Tel Aviv has been a regular participant in the European competition, including the UEFA Champions League and the UEFA Europa League.⁴ The club has played fixtures across Europe for several decades, including three in England, often under heightened security conditions reflective of the political context associated with campaigns to exclude Israel from participation in international sport.

Maccabi Tel Aviv's European participation has generally proceeded without major incident, although, as with many clubs competing internationally, fixtures have occasionally attracted protest, enhanced policing, or political attention unrelated to the conduct of the club or its supporters. UEFA disciplinary actions involving the club have tended to concern specific incidents or individuals rather than systemic or persistent disorder attributable to the supporter base as a whole.

The club's thirty year integration into UEFA competition is an important contextual factor: Maccabi Tel Aviv is not an exceptional or unfamiliar participant in European football, nor is its presence in such competitions novel in these sporting contexts.

Supporter base and fan culture

Maccabi Tel Aviv's supporter base is large and heterogeneous. It includes supporters from across Israeli society: encompassing varied ethnic, religious, and political identities, as well as supporters within the Jewish diaspora who follow the club for familial, cultural, or historical

³ Associate member status, 1992; full member status, 1994. UEFA is the governing body of football in Europe.

⁴ Maccabi Tel Aviv have qualified for UEFA competitions on seventeen occasions

reasons. The majority of supporters attend matches for sporting purposes and do not engage in political expression.

As with many major clubs in Europe, a minority of supporters are affiliated with organised ultras groups. These groups form a visible, but limited, component of the overall fan base and are not representative of Maccabi Tel Aviv as a whole. Organised supporter groups have, at times, been associated with confrontational behaviour, both domestically and abroad, but this phenomenon is not unique to Maccabi Tel Aviv and reflects broader patterns within European football culture.

UK policing and football governance have long recognised the distinction between organised risk groups and wider supporter population.⁵ This distinction is relevant when assessing the appropriateness of collective versus targeted measures in managing supporter-related risk.

The Europa League fixture against Aston Villa and its context

The Aston Villa vs Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture formed part of the UEFA Europa League, one of Europe's major club competitions. Aston Villa's participation in the European competition attracted significant domestic and international attention, and the fixture was scheduled to take place at Villa Park, a stadium with a large capacity (42,640) and a long history of hosting high-profile matches.

This was a high-profile European fixture involving an Israeli club at a time when antizionist agitation was confidently asserting that Israel was committing genocide. In that context it seemed plausible to some that, young men, who in Israel routinely serve in the Israeli Defence Force, and who constitute the majority of potentially disruptive football fans, should be regarded as having come directly from committing genocide in Gaza. This was the period following the 7th October attack on Israel and the multi-dimensional conflict that erupted in its aftermath across the Middle East. In the UK, this period was marked by increased concern regarding community tensions, protests relating to the conflict, and a rise in reported antisemitic incidents (see previous figures). These broader conditions formed part of the environment in which risk assessments for the fixture were undertaken.

This context contributed to the perception of elevated risk, notwithstanding the absence of any prior history of disorder involving Maccabi Tel Aviv fixtures in England.

UK-Israel sensitivities and domestic implications

In 1990, the Conservative politician Norman Tebbit suggested that it was unpatriotic for British people to support the cricket team of their family lineage, such as India, Pakistan or the West Indies, rather than England. This claim was widely ridiculed because the practice is generally accepted as unremarkable. When Scotland, Nigeria, Jamaica or Ghana play the England football team at Wembley, they attract vocal and enthusiastic support from diaspora communities in England.

Similarly, when Israeli teams play in Britain, they tend to attract interest and support from British Jews, for many of whom an attachment to Israel is an element of their Jewish identity. But supporting Israel is not considered by everybody to be a harmless issue of identity, particularly at a time when there are significant efforts to construct Israel as a pariah state. If a

⁵ National Police Chief's Council, UK Football Policing Unit: Policing Football and Operational Advice

decision is made that may impact access to such fixtures, there may be implications that extend beyond core football supporters to others who may have wanted to attend the game. Restrictions may be experienced by members of the Jewish community as affecting their participation in public life more broadly, particularly in periods when antisemitism is perceived to be rising and when similar restrictions are not imposed onto other diaspora communities in analogous circumstances. This dynamic does not negate legitimate public order considerations, but it does increase the importance of careful calibration, clear communication, and evidence-based justification when restrictive measures are contemplated.

The exceptional nature of the decision

The decision to prohibit Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters from attending the Aston Villa fixture was exceptional within British contexts. Blanket, pre-emptive prohibitions on away supporters are rare and are typically associated with acute, match-specific intelligence indicating a high and unmanageable risk of serious disorder.

In the UK, high risk fixtures – including those involving clubs with established histories of hooliganism, political rivalry, or sectarian tension – are ordinarily managed through:

- Enhanced policing
- Intelligence-led targeting of known risk individuals
- Controlled ticketing arrangements
- Segregation measures

Collective exclusion of an entire supporter group is not standard practice and is generally regarded as a measure of last resort, with only one precedented event of this nature to occur in English football history. The Luton Riot (1985) was one of the worst incidents of football hooliganism in the 1980s, and led to a ban on away supporters by Luton Town lasting four seasons (1986-1990). The decision therefore marked a departure from established norms in football policing and raised questions about the thresholds applied in this case.

In general, Home Office police forces, football authorities and football clubs have developed routine practices for containing even fierce and potentially violent football rivalries without such measures. This has been the case, for example in Glasgow, when football fan identities have mapped quite explicitly onto those in violent conflicts outside of the country.

Significance beyond the fixture

The implications of this tension extend beyond the immediate fixture itself. If banning away supporters, including British supporters of the away team, sets a precedent, then broader questions are raised about how the UK Government manages sporting events involving politically sensitive teams, particularly where supporter identity overlaps with protected characteristics – such as nationality, ‘race’ and religion.

The case of Maccabi Tel Aviv’s visit to Aston Villa may therefore be significant, not only as a matter of governance or public order management, but also as an indicator of how equality principles and policing standards are applied under conditions of heightened political pressure.

The prehistory: relevant background factors

Function of prehistory in risk assessment

Prehistory serves a specific and explicitly limited function: it provides contextual awareness that may inform decisions but does not, in itself, constitute evidence of future risk. UK policing standard operating procedures and Cabinet Office guidance⁶ emphasise that historical incidents must be assessed for transferability, specificity, and recency before being relied upon as justification for exceptional measures.

There were three issues relating to the analysis of the prehistory that may have undermined the ability of WMP to accurately construct the prehistory baseline in a way that supported later decision-making. They were:

- The background material cited was real, but it was significantly partial, and so was only weakly transferable
- Established standard operating procedures would normally require event-specific intelligence to justify exceptional measures
- The distinction between context and evidence becomes central to assessing proportionality and necessity

Maccabi Tel Aviv ultras – structure, behaviour and evidential limits

Utilising 'ultra' as a supporter definition

Ultras can be understood as a transnational supporter subculture characterised by intense loyalty, choreographed display, and a preference for self-organisation independent of official club channels.

Ultras groups are often categorised according to three criteria. First relating to highly visual identity building (banners, tifos, coordinated displays etc), second to more complex and ritualised chanting, and third, a norm of solidarity that has the potential to shade into confrontation with other rival groups. But ultras are not necessarily or inherently violent. In many European contexts, they coexist with club community structures, negotiate informally with police, and operate within clearly understood boundaries.

The risk associated with ultras is therefore situational rather than categorical. It must be demonstrated in the specific context rather than just inferred from the involvement of a group calling itself 'Ultra'. It arises when these three factors coincide:

- a) Politicised symbolism
- b) Poorly managed segregation and/or crowd flows
- c) The presence of rival risk groups

Generally speaking, ultras communities remain numerically small relative to the total supporter base - internally fragmented, and subject to strong internal norms that discourage uncontrolled

⁶ HM Government National Risk Register, 2025; National Police Chief's Council Events Guidance, 2022; National Police Chief's Council: Policing Football Operational Advice, 2022

escalation. As such, the mere presence of an ultras contingent does not, in itself, justify exceptional restrictions; instead warranting precise, intelligence-led management consistent with standard police operating procedures within England and Wales.

Evidence of disorder in the past concerning Maccabi Tel Aviv ultras

Whilst there is documented evidence of confrontational behaviour by Israeli ultras in the context of Israeli domestic football, and local fan rivalries of a kind that is familiar in British and European football (see below), there is limited evidence of sustained or coordinated disorder by Maccabi Tel Aviv ultras in international fixtures. We will discuss below, the specific case of the disorder in Amsterdam around a Maccabi Tel Aviv game earlier in the same season. In general, there is no record of Maccabi Tel Aviv fans, or Israeli fans in general, of being involved in violence abroad. This may be in part related to the extensive experience in policing football that exists in the UK and in other jurisdictions, as well as the existence of robust policing frameworks more generally.

Crucially in relation to the Aston Villa match, there was:

- Limited intelligence (publicly accessible) indicating organised travel by known ultras to Birmingham⁷
- No UK Football Policing Unit warnings identifying specific individuals that we are aware of, in the public domain
- No evidence to suggest patterns of ticket acquisition consistent with organised risk-group attendance

The evidential threshold for pre-emptive exclusion requires⁸ a demonstration that risk cannot be mitigated through targeted measures. In this case, the ultras factor supports the model of enhanced monitoring, not blanket prohibition.

Israeli domestic football culture and hooliganism

Israeli football has experienced episodes of hooliganism and supporter violence comparable to these seen historically in other European leagues. Academic and policing literature indicates that these such incidents are primarily: domestic, rivalry-driven, and context specific. Maccabi Tel Aviv's domestic incidents are not exceptional when compared to clubs of similar size and prominence.

Relevance of rivalry with Hapoel Tel Aviv

Maccabi's Tel Aviv city rivals are Hapoel Tel Aviv. Hapoel is descended from a more explicitly left wing tradition of socialist Zionism than Maccabi, they play in red and the hammer and sickle is prominent on their club badge. The rivalry between Maccabi Tel Aviv and Hapoel Tel Aviv has occasionally produced disorder, sometimes framed in ideological terms.

However, this rivalry:

- Is geographically and socially bounded

⁷ It had been made clear by Maccabi Tel Aviv and it had been clearly communicated by Lord Mann that the ultras would not travel to the fixture.

⁸ National Police Chief's Council: Policing Football Operational Advice, 2022

- Does not typically manifest in international contexts
- Has no operational relevance in the absence of Hapoel supporters

Invoking the Hapoel rivalry in the context of the Aston Villa fixture risks exporting domestic football symbolism and identity into a context where it is of very little relevance, and trying to make it do explanatory work which it cannot legitimately do. However, in the interest of full disclosure, it is important to address the abandoned Tel Aviv derby in October 2025, that resulted in nine arrests. This incident occurred after the decision to exclude away fans from Villa Park had been made and after public debate about it had been raging for a few days in the UK. Some greeted the trouble in Tel Aviv as a vindication of their position on the Aston Villa game.

The fixture was abandoned prior to kick off on police advice, amid significant crowd disorder at Bloomfield Stadium, including riots, the hurling of objects, smoke grenades, and fireworks – with injuries reported among both civilians and emergency service personnel.

Whilst this incident does represent one of the more severe episodes of supporter disorder in the 2025-2026 Israeli Premier League season, the relevance to an international fixture in the United Kingdom is limited. This derby took place in a shared domestic stadium environment, and occurred under different policing and cultural conditions to the European/British context. As such, although the abandonment of the derby formed part of the broader context in which risk perceptions may have been shaped into the future, it does not in itself, provide direct evidence of risk transferability to the Aston Villa fixture. Proper assessment requires distinguishing between localised domestic disorder and event-specific intelligence relevant to fixtures overseas.

Positionality of Beitar Jerusalem

Maccabi Tel Aviv is positioned as right wing in relation to Hapoel, but in relation to Beitar Jerusalem, it is associated more with the identity of the City of Tel Aviv in general, being secular, left and liberal. Beitar is widely regarded as the football club most associated with Israel's right wing nationalist and religious communities. Founded in 1936, the club is based in a city with profound political and religious significance, and this identity has shaped the character of its far reaching supporter base. 'La Familia,' as they are often regarded, is associated with nationalist and 'settler' ideology, with some factions openly expressing far-right views, including racist hostility to Arab-Israelis and Palestinians – frequently with a vulgarity and clarity characteristic of football terraces.

This political positioning distinguishes Beitar Jerusalem from clubs like Maccabi and Hapoel (Tel Aviv), whose fanbases encompass broader and more diverse ideological and demographic profiles.

Beitar's supporters frequently use football matches as a venue for expressing nationalist sentiments:

- Examples of racist and anti-Arab slogans and banners resulting in sanctions from the Israeli Football Association and UEFA

- Violent clashes with rival fans, pitch invasions, and confrontations with police resulting in arrests and fines, partial stadium closures, and fan bans
- Refusal to accept Arab players

Despite repeated condemnation by club officials and public figures, these patterns of behaviour have persisted intermittently, contributing to a reputation of being a flashpoint for ethnopolitical tension.

In assessing risk for international fixtures, Beitar Jerusalem exemplifies the challenges of disentangling political expression, fan culture, and public order risks. Nationalist orientations and a history of controversial conduct mean that matches involving Beitar Jerusalem can attract close scrutiny from authorities, particularly when these take place abroad.

However, as with other Israeli clubs, it is crucial to avoid generalising the behaviour of specific, often small, extremist subgroups to the wider supporter base. The vast majority of supporters attend matches without incident, and do not engage in discriminatory or violent behaviour.

Beitar Jerusalem's notoriety also informs broader perceptions of Israeli football supporters, sometimes heightening security concerns beyond what event-specific intelligence might warrant. Understanding the nuances of Beitar supporter identity, history, and behaviour is therefore essential to proportional and evidence-based risk assessments in the context of European and global sport.

Political expression and supporter identity - Maccabi Tel Aviv

Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters attend matches for varied reasons – sporting loyalty, diaspora identity, cultural affiliation, social participation – with empirical studies⁹ of Israeli supporter demographics indicating significant ethnic, religious, and political diversity – including both Jewish and non-Jewish supporters.

There is a documented risk, particularly in periods of geopolitical tension, that supporter identity is conflated with political allegiance or state action. Such conflation can distort threat assessments by:

- Imputing collective intent
- Overestimating ideological cohesion
- Underestimating situational behaviour norms.

⁹ Bernstein, P and Leif, D (2025). *The Beautiful Game on a Muslim Pitch: How Football and Religion are shaping Identity and Society*. Edinburgh University Press.

Cohen, A (2017). Fans' identification with teams: A field study of Israeli soccer fans. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1375062>

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Comparative practice: Europe, UEFA, and Israel in sport and popular culture

Across European football, there is an operational preference for targeted interventions over comprehensive exclusion of visiting supporters. Legislation within England and Wales¹⁰ broadly converge on the principle that restrictions should be proportionate, specific, and time limited - with measures such as:

- Limiting allocation numbers
- Imposing ticket holder identification requirements
- Mandating organised transport
- Confining supporters to accredited travel routes and controlled gathering areas

UEFA retains the right to require partial closure of stadia, and complete fan bans, but this has historically been operationalised only where credible intelligence suggests acute and imminent risk that cannot be realistically mitigated through less drastic and more routine means. Even then, fan bans usually apply to a particular fixture or a short sequence of matches, rather than to a club's participation as a whole.

Importantly, these decisions are ordinarily framed as policing judgements concerning risk, not as assessments of the moral standing of a club, its supporters, or their national identity. In the case of the Aston Villa v Maccabi Tel Aviv match, the political campaign for a general boycott of Israel became entangled with the call for a ban of away supporters, which was framed in terms of the safety of the fixture itself and also the desirability of allowing Israeli fans (portrayed steeped in Islamophobic and genocidal culture) to roam the streets of Aston and Birmingham more generally, with their significant Muslim communities.

The official policing preference for targeted restriction reflects several institutional considerations:

1. Minimises the infringement of supporter rights to lawful movement and expression under domestic human rights regimes
2. Recognises that blanket bans can unintentionally displace risk, pushing unauthorised travel underground, where it becomes harder to supervise
3. Reinforces the norms that sanctions should attach to demonstrable misconduct rather than to presumed risk based on group identity

Where fixtures present heightened sensitivities – political protest, local rivalries, or previous disorder – many European states, including the UK, have adopted the model of enhanced policing rather than spectator prohibition. This typically includes cross-border intelligence sharing, pre-match surveillance of high risk groups, coordination with club liaison officers, and the deployment of specialist public order units. Many police forces within the UK rely on dynamic risk assessments, allowing match commanders to escalate interventions in real time if conditions deteriorate.

¹⁰ Football Spectators Act, 1989; Football Spectators (Prescription) Order, 2022

This framework of policing is significantly pragmatic. Historically, visible and proportionate policing combined with precise supporter management – turnstile segregation, timed egress, policing bubbles for away coaches – often deters opportunistic disorder without criminalising the entire travelling supporter base. Moreover, proactive engagement with supporter groups (including ultras) can yield operational dividends by establishing communication channels through which rumours can be dispelled and flashpoints diffused.

Blanket prohibition is, by contrast, blunt. Whilst it can remove some risks, it can also generate others:

- Legal challenges
- Allegations of discrimination
- Reputational costs to host institutions who appear unable to manage events

Consequently, where fan bans are imposed, oversight bodies increasingly expect a clear demonstration that lesser tools were considered and found insufficient, and that the criteria for prohibition are transparently documented.

Comparative case examples

1. Russian clubs have, at times, faced stringent crowd controls in European competition. Sanctions have included partial stadium closures, sector-specific bans, and enhanced security obligations. However, even when Russian supporters were categorised as high risk, authorities have generally avoided categorical travel prohibitions unless specific threats have existed. Following the Russian invasion of The Ukraine, the exclusion of teams occurred not through policing assessments but as a geopolitical sanction by governing bodies, underscoring the distinction between disciplinary measures and security decisions.
2. In Serbia, domestic derbies, such as Red Star–Partizan have periodically been played under severe restrictions due to entrenched hooligan networks. Policing strategies have tended to combine intensive intelligence operations with surgically targeted bans on identified violent groups, rather than eliminating away support entirely from competitions. UEFA has repeatedly sanctioned clubs over organised disorder, but again in ways calibrated to precise incidents – sector closures, fines, or supervised match conditions – rather than presumptive blanket exclusions.
3. Türkiye presents a different pattern, however. Matches involving clubs such as Galatasaray or Fenerbahçe often attract intense atmospheres, political banners, and occasional disorder. There have been a number of incidents where authorities have imposed localised bans on visiting supporters in particularly volatile fixtures, but these have usually been reciprocal and negotiated.

In many cases, Israeli clubs in European competitions have experienced both modes of treatment. Often, Israeli clubs compete under enhanced security operations that function smoothly and without major incident. On a small number of occasions,¹¹ fixtures have been

¹¹ Hapoel Tel Aviv vs AC Milan (2002), Hapoel Ramat Gan vs Levski Sofia (2003), UEFA ban on European fixtures in Israel (2023 – present)

played outside of Israel and have been justified in situational terms – often in times of increased conflict – not as standing judgements that Israeli supporters present an inherently unmanageable threat. Where restrictions have been imposed, questions have consistently arisen about proportionality, consistency with treatment of other clubs, and the risk of normalising exceptional measures.

Taken together, these comparative examples indicate a strong European norm:

- Graduated, intelligence-led management is preferred
- Blanket prohibitions are extraordinary and require transparent justification

Where departures from that norm occur, they attract scrutiny not only for their immediate safety rationale, but also for their potential to create precedent.

Israel and international sport

Historical context

International sport reflects broader political and social conflicts. The 1936 Berlin Olympics became a paradigmatic case of how sport could be manipulated as a tool for political ideology and exclusion. Jewish athletes faced systemic discrimination, and the event foreshadowed the complex relationship between identity, politics, and athletic competition that would later affect the Jewish people and the state of Israel.

This intertwining of politics was tragically underscored in 1972 at the Munich Olympic Games, when the armed Palestinian group ‘Black September’ carried out a targeted attack on the Israeli National Team, which resulted in the murder of eleven Israeli athletes and coaches. The games carried on with little interruption and the Olympic movement subsequently found it difficult to agree on an appropriate way to remember and commemorate the attack. The Munich massacre heightened security concerns around Israel’s subsequent participation in international competition.

Notwithstanding such events, and as anti-Israel feeling has intensified, Israel’s integration on the world sporting stage has faced increasing challenges.

The Asian boycott and the reintegration of Israel (1970s – 1990s)

Following the Arab-Israeli War (1967), pressure from Arab League states intensified within Asian Federations. In 1974, two years after the murders at the Munich Olympics, Israel was formally expelled from the Asian Football Confederation. This was the culmination of a campaign over the preceding years for the cancellation of fixtures involving Israel and for the refusal of others to compete with Israeli individuals and teams.

The boycott was not confined to football. In multi-sport frameworks – Asian Games federations, regional tournaments, and qualifying (Olympic) structures – Israeli participation regularly triggered withdrawals, protests, or administrative moves to avoid direct competition. The rationale was sometimes framed in disciplinary or security terms, but it was explicitly political: participation with Israel was presented by opposing states as incompatible with Palestinian solidarity.

This institutional marginalisation of Israel had several long term consequences:

- Fragmentation of Israel's competitive pathways, forcing *ad hoc* arrangements
- Establishment of a precedent whereby political contestation translated into sporting isolation without necessary proof of genuine misconduct
- Fostering a sense within Israeli sporting institutions that administrative forums could become arenas for *de facto* sanction outside formal, international legal processes

The Asian boycott therefore represents formative context in the pre-history of the Aston Villa controversy, demonstrating how political pressure can shape competition structures and participant rights well in advance of any match specific risk assessment. It is against this historical backdrop, that contemporary decisions – including crowd restrictions impacting Israeli clubs – are read domestically as potential reiterations of earlier exclusionary logics, even when host authorities justify them primarily on security grounds.

UEFA admission and the European framework (1990s – present)

A rhetorical question is often raised: why is Israel in UEFA, when it is not in Europe? As though this represented some kind of vindication of claims surrounding Israel's European-ness and its imposition as an alien implant into the Middle East. But Israel found a home in UEFA because it was unjustly and arbitrarily excluded from Asia.

Israel's phased admission into UEFA from 1992 marked a decisive strategic shift. The move was framed as pragmatic rather than ideological: European federations could provide stable competition calendars, enforceable disciplinary standards, and a shared policing centre.

UEFA's formal position has been consistent: football is not to become the venue for political sanctions absent explicit international mandates, and clubs should not be punished solely because of the actions of their governments. Yet in practice, national authorities retain discretion over public order and can impose conditions when they judge risks to exceed manageable thresholds.

The key analytical point is that the European framework aims to normalise participation, yet the political sensitivity surrounding Israel means that ostensibly technical safety judgements often operate under significantly greater public scrutiny. Decisions that would be unremarkable for other clubs can therefore acquire broader symbolic meaning and are interpreted through a longer history of politicised exclusion.

The Olympic Games

In Olympic contexts, similar controversies have periodically surfaced. Athletes from certain countries have withdrawn from competition rather than face Israeli opponents – sometimes citing domestic political constraints, at other times presenting the refusal as a moral stance. The International Olympic Committee and relevant international federations have increasingly treated such refusals as violations of the principle of universality, with disciplinary outcomes reinforcing standards that participation must be neutral and that political disputes cannot determine sporting engagement.

Yet the persistence of these incidents highlights durable tension. Global sporting bodies remain committed to equal access and non-discrimination, whilst a subset of actors continues to view

disengagement from Israel as a form of political expression. The result is a recurring operational challenge: competitions proceed, but organisers must anticipate walkouts, legal appeals, and security sensitivities, even when no misconduct from Israeli teams is alleged. This dynamic provides important comparative context, demonstrating how institutions have generally responded by maintaining inclusion whilst managing risk.

The Eurovision Song Contest

At Eurovision, protests have ranged from calls to boycott host cities to organised demonstrations outside venues, coordinated online harassment of artists and broadcasters, and lobbying campaigns directed at national delegations. On several occasions, public broadcasters have faced petitions urging withdrawal if Israel participates.¹² Security planning for Eurovision events involving Israel routinely includes designated protest zones, enhanced screening protocols, and contingency arrangements for reputational and digital risk.

The European Broadcasting Union consistently maintains that Eurovision is a cultural competition rather than a political forum, mirroring UEFA's formal insistence on the apolitical nature of sport. However, organisers have repeatedly operated in an environment where Israeli participation becomes symbolically charged, requiring additional dialogue with local authorities, law enforcements, and civil society actors.

Discussion

For the purposes of this report, the comparative lesson is not that Israeli teams face unique operational challenges, but that the meaning of decisions involving them is rarely confined to stadium logistics. The Aston Villa decision, therefore, sits within a lineage of contested participation: measures may be justified in immediate policing terms, yet inevitably resonate with a history in which Israeli athletes and supporters have sometimes experienced differentiated treatment unrelated to their conduct.

European and international precedent overwhelmingly favours inclusion with robust risk management. Exclusion is used sparingly, temporarily, and on the basis of clearly demonstrated and unmitigable risk. The pre-emptive prohibition on Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters sits at the edge of that spectrum and warrants careful justification if it is to be regarded as consistent with established practice and the wider commitment to equal participation in public life.

¹² Iceland, Ireland, Slovenia, Spain and The Netherlands all pulled out of the 2026 competition

Amsterdam – Ajax vs Maccabi Tel Aviv: evidential assessment

On the 7th- 8th November 2024, significant unrest occurred in Amsterdam following a UEFA Europa League fixture between Ajax and Maccabi Tel Aviv. Multiple sources recorded that a series of violent incidents erupted in the city in the period immediately before and after the match.

There was disagreement over the causes and the nature of the violence. Some argued that there was a pre-emptive, well-organised and widespread antisemitic attack against supporters of Maccabi Tel Aviv: others understood the Israelis to have been responsible for instigating violence against local Muslims and against anti-Israeli demonstrators, and they justified violence against Maccabi supporters as self-defence or counter-violence.

At a municipal press conference on the 8th November, the Mayor of Amsterdam, Femke Halsema said:

"Amsterdam is looking back on a pitch-black night and today it's still dark... last night, hateful, antisemitic rioters and criminals harassed and beat up Jewish Israeli visitors, guests in our city... individuals on scooters crisscrossed the city searching for supporters of Maccabi Tel Aviv. It was a hit-and-run. Football fans were beaten and kicked after which the rioters ran away, fleeing from the police force, who were present in large numbers yesterday."

At the same press conference, the Acting Chief of Police in Amsterdam said:

"Around 23:00 hours the situation around the stadium was calm but the problems arose at a later time in the city centre. Groups of Maccabi were walking through the city centre and rioters committed hit-and-run actions targeting Israeli supporters. From here there were a few severe incidents of assault in several places in the centre... despite a large police presence until late at night. The police decided at a certain moment to gather a large group of Maccabi supporters and to protect them."

His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of The Netherlands:

"I have spoken with President Herzog about events in Amsterdam last night... we must not look away from antisemitic behaviour on our streets. History has taught us how intimidation goes from bad to worse, with horrific consequences. Jewish people must feel safe in the Netherlands, everywhere and at all times. We embrace them all and hold them close."

From municipal and police reports in Amsterdam:

- Approximately 62 individuals were arrested in connection with disorderly conduct, assault, and public order offences associated with the disturbances
- Five people were hospitalised with severe injuries
- Riot police intervened on multiple occasions to protect visiting supporters and escort them back to accommodation

Dutch authorities deployed a substantial law enforcement presence in response to the unrest and placed a prohibition order on all demonstrations in Amsterdam for three days following the incident in an effort to stabilise public order.

The acting police chief in Amsterdam, Peter Holla, reported that the operation involved large numbers of officers, though exact staffing levels reported to Dutch sources varied by shift; an estimate of more than 1200 officers was cited locally to handle the situation on the ground.

Judicial outcomes and suspect identification

In the months following the unrest:

- The Netherlands Public Prosecution Service compiled a list of 122 suspects linked to a range of violent incidents occurring from the 6th – 8th November 2024
- Of these, ten individuals were suspected of being Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters, with the remaining suspects described by the service as ‘Pro-Palestine sympathisers,’ or individuals participating in disorder
- By March 2025, approximately 36 of the suspects had been identified, with prosecuting authorities focusing on those alleged to have engaged in the most serious incidents of violence

In December 2024, a Dutch court sentenced five individuals for offences connected to the unrest – including violent assault, theft, and public violence. Sentences ranged from 100 hours community service to six months imprisonment, and court statements noted that the violence was driven more by sentiments connected to the broader geopolitical environment, than by organised hate or antisemitic intent – a necessity for terrorism offences.

The diversity of outcomes highlights that the unrest surrounding the match encompassed a mix of conduct types, and that the legal approach pursued individual culpability rather than collective charges such as conspiracy or organised hate crime.

Limitations and evidential gaps

It is important to acknowledge evidential limitations:

- Dutch law enforcement does not routinely publish full internal intelligence assessments; public reporting reflects operational summaries rather than exhaustive case files
- Some cases relating to the unrest were dropped following the loss of CCTV evidence, complicating prosecutorial efforts and evidential clarity

These limitations mean that insofar as analysis of motivation, or the structural organisation behind the events, is based on these kinds of official sources and conclusions, some caution is appropriate. There is a limit to what is demonstrably evidenced in court records and conclusions of officially commissioned investigations.

Institutional and political statements

In the UK, West Midlands Police claimed that official sources from The Netherlands underpinned their intelligence assessment, asserting that:

- Dutch police reported that significant disorder was caused by Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters in Amsterdam and
- Certain groups who had been involved in that violence were considered likely to travel to the UK fixture and to pose a similar threat there
- Local community concerns from Amsterdam (or from Birmingham, based on imputed community concerns from Amsterdam?) were recorded in community impact statements

But this story was by no means unambiguously borne out by the evidence from Amsterdam. A range of institutional actors responded publicly to the unrest in The Netherlands. Dutch authorities have publicly challenged some interpretations of events cited by West Midlands Police, which were claimed to be based on evidence from official Dutch reports. In particular Dutch authorities disavowed British reports that claimed they had affirmed that hundreds of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters had deliberately targeted specific communities in Amsterdam. This was not true, they said, and were unrecognised by the relevant police forces. No operational investigation concluded that level of organised targeting. On the 19th November 2025, the Jewish Chronicle reported viewing a dossier from the Dutch Police, stating that Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters were the “victims of groups looking for a confrontation.”

Scrutiny by UK Parliamentary committees brought into question the evidential basis for some of the claims made by West Midlands Police. For example, concerns have been raised by MPs that factual errors were present in police material: in the West Midlands Police case for excluding visiting fans, a reference was made to a previous fixture between Maccabi Tel Aviv and West Ham United, at which Maccabi fans had been responsible for causing significant unrest. It emerged, however, that this fixture never happened and that consequently Israeli fans bore no such responsibility. This evidence had been invented by an Artificial Intelligence programme which had been relied upon, unchecked, by those responsible for compiling the risk assessment. This error has been admitted by West Midlands Police, and there has been an official apology.

John Mann, The Lord Mann of Holbeck Moor – His Majesty’s Independent Advisor for Antisemitism – testified that “the facts were slightly changed to fit the decisions made.” He identified a number of mistakes that had been made in the risk assessment relating to the interpretation of the events in Amsterdam, and also in the Chief Constable’s subsequent defence of that process before the Parliamentary committee. His view was that the decision to ban away fans had been made first, and reasons had been found to justify that decision.

Allegations of a “Jew hunt” - origins of the claim

Following the unrest in Amsterdam, some commentary – both in political, media and social media discourse, referred to the Amsterdam events in November 2024 as a “Jew hunt.” The allegation was that antizionist and/or antisemitic groups systematically organised the violence, which was targeted at Israeli supporters based on their Jewish and national identities. The term ‘Jew-hunt’ has emerged in public debate, but did not originate as a formal finding of law enforcement agencies.

The claim appears to have gained traction, in part, due to:

- Maccabi Europe officials in Amsterdam at the time of the violence said that they had evidence that the term 'Jew-hunt' had been used by the people organising the violence
- There were vivid media descriptions of street violence, including individuals being thrown into freezing canals
- Social media reports
- Political interpretations imported into domestic debates around public order and antisemitism

Evidence cited in support

Proponents of the "Jew hunt" characterisation have cited:

- Social media videos and eyewitness accounts alleging targeted attacks
- Organisers of the attacks in Amsterdam referring to their activities as a "Jew hunt"
- Statements from community advocates interpreting the events through the lens of antisemitism
- International political condemnations framing the violence in terms in evocative and historical persecution

These sources are interpretive and selective, rather than official investigative conclusions. But the narrative that there had been a "Jew-hunt" was strengthened by comments from municipal officials at the municipal press conference on the 8th November 2024.

It is also important to note the circumstances in which individuals were prosecuted as a result of the unrest and the antisemitic rhetoric present in the organisation and communication surrounding the violence:

- Defendant A: found to have delivered a karate style kick that caused the victim to fall against a moving tram. CCTV showed they were involved in a number of attacks across the city and had a leading role in the violence unrelated to football
- Defendant B: received a custodial sentence after participating in a WhatsApp group entitled "Buurthuis2" of more than 900 members, in which potential victims were described as "cowardly Jews," and where informed was shared to facilitate violence "against people of Jewish descent and/or supporters of Maccabi Tel Aviv"
- Defendant C: CCTV evidence shows them repeatedly kicking victims, grabbing one supporter by the throat and seizing a scarf. Messages were also attributed to them having referenced a "Jew hunt" across the city, although they denied harbouring antisemitic motives
- Defendant D: used violence against a police officer and belonged to a Snapchat group calling for attacks on Maccabi supporters

Evidence complicating the claim

Police and judicial processes did not prove this view of events:

- Coordination or organised targeting is not reflected in judicial charges brought against suspects, which focused on individual violent conduct rather than conspiracy or systematic hate crimes
- Public statements by Dutch police describe violence involving multiple parties and groups, with clashes occurring in multiple locations, rather than a centrally directed campaign against Israeli supporters
- UEFA fined Maccabi Tel Aviv €20,000 and handed them a suspended ban on allowing fans at an away match in Europe for anti-Palestinian chanting at a later match against Stuttgart

Whilst the majority of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters travelled to Amsterdam to attend a football match peacefully, a number of widely reported incidents demonstrate that elements within the visiting support engaged in conduct that contributed to heightened tensions within the city.

In the 24–48 hours preceding the fixture, video evidence showed small groups of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters marching through central Amsterdam, chanting politically charged slogans and, in at least one recorded incident, removing a Palestinian flag from a building near the Rokin canal and subsequently burning it in Dam Square. Other footage documented confrontations with passers-by and minor acts of vandalism, including the damaging of a taxi in the same area. These activities attracted significant public attention and drew police resources prior to the fixture.

From a public order perspective, such actions are significant for two reasons:

1. They were perceived by some people locally as provocative in the context of intense sensitivities regarding the Israel-Gaza conflict
2. They blurred the boundary between football fandom (and/or hooliganism) and overt political expression
3. Although political chanting and symbolic displays fall within the ambit of free expression in most European jurisdictions, the burning of flags and aggressive chanting in congested urban areas created crowd dynamics that increased the likelihood of confrontation and police intervention

Discussion

It is also necessary to distinguish between proactive acts by some supporters and the wider Maccabi Tel Aviv supporter base. Available records do not attribute the subsequent violence to collective or organised behaviour by Israeli supporters, nor do they identify systematic involvement in assaults. The incidents instead illustrate how a relatively small number of politically expressive acts can alter the perception of risk, both in public discourse and in police processes. They can escalate tensions, but of course they cannot justify violence directed against visiting fans.

At the same time, the judicial record makes clear that explicitly antisemitic language and intent were present during the disorder. In several cases, offenders used digital messaging groups to identify Jewish targets and self-described their own actions using the phrase “Jew hunt.” These communications in themselves were not evidence of a centrally directed campaign, but they

demonstrate that elements of the violence were shaped by hostility to Jews as such, rather than simply by hostility to Israel, or by football rivalry alone.

The evidence is clear that the Amsterdam disorder developed via complex interaction:

1. there was some politically charged behaviour by a minority of visiting supporters
2. There was opportunistic - and in some cases - coordinated violence
3. Some of it was motivated and/or aggravated by antisemitism
4. The authorities faced a formidable challenge in managing events at a time of heightened public sensitivities.

Recognising this complexity is essential when assessing later decisions made in the United Kingdom concerning risk, proportionality, and the treatment of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters.

The decision making process in the Aston Villa Case

This section reconstructs as best we can, according to the available evidence, the chain of decisions that led to the prohibition of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters attending the Europa League fixture at Aston Villa.

It distinguishes between operational policing judgements, club level responsibilities, and the wider political environment. The evaluation of whether these decisions were justified and proportionate, or discriminatory, is reserved for the following chapter.

This chapter draws on:

- Publicly available Safety Advisory Group (SAG) material
- West Midlands Police statements (including Operation Parkmill peer review and the Silver Command Log)
- Submissions to parliamentary committees
- Evidence from club and local authority officials
- Contemporaneous reporting

Where accounts diverge, the narrative follows points of documented agreement rather than contested interpretation.

The assessment of West Midlands Police

West Midlands Police (WMP) initially categorised the match as a heightened risk European fixture, reflecting the combination of a visiting international club, evening kick off time, and limited familiarity with the travelling fan base. Following the Amsterdam disorder, the risk categorisation was reassessed.

In internal briefings to partners, WMP emphasised the “possibility,” rather than the confirmed presence, of hostile actors targeting the fixture because of its own political symbolism.

By the time the fixture was confirmed, WMP were already managing:

- Regular protest activity linked to the conflict in the Middle East, much of which was based on the claim that Israel was committing genocide
- Counter protests and protests against antisemitism organised at short notice
- High policing demand weekends across the force area

Senior commanders therefore placed the fixture into a wider calendar of tension and did not treat it as an isolated event. Internal language emphasised “accumulated strain on command resilience” and the risk of “simultaneous incidents.”

This framing is important: once an event sits within the narrative of cumulative risk, precautionary logic may become more persuasive.

The intelligence inputs available to WMP consisted of:

- Incident reporting and open source analysis relating to Amsterdam
- General threat assessments concerning protests linked to the Middle East
- Precautionary assumptions that Israeli participation could attract disorder

The intelligence flowing into WMP is heterogeneous:

Source	Nature of information	Strength
<i>National Football Policing Unit</i>	Travel expectations, known supporter behaviours, liaison with other forces	Moderate
<i>Counter-terrorism and public order units</i>	Dynamics of protests, monitoring of online mobilisation	Moderate-high (contextual not specific)
<i>Overseas policing links</i>	General experience with Israeli clubs	Limited
<i>Open source analysis</i>	Social media agitation, rhetoric around boycotts	Variable
<i>Private briefings from community partners</i>	Concerns about local tensions	Anecdotal, but influential

Notably, there is no evidence in the public record^{13*} of specific threat warnings naming individuals, groups, or planned actions directly linked to Birmingham. Much of this evidence described conditions rather than plans, suggesting that the assessment relied more on contextual interference than on event-specific intelligence. The presence of these threat shadows¹⁴ did not lead to a downgrading of risk. Instead, WMP inferred that volatile atmospheres could generate “opportunistic disorder,” especially at interchanges where football crowds and protests might intersect accidentally.

Standard operating procedures within West Midlands Police distinguishes:

- Risk: likelihood of harm given prevailing conditions
- Threat: presence of identified actors with intent and capability

The Aston Villa fixture leaned heavily on risk factors:

- Symbolic visibility of an Israeli club
- Ongoing protest activity nationally
- Potential for spontaneous counter protests
- Difficulties in segregating rival groups in the approaches to the stadium

The College of Policing’s ‘Joint Decision Model,’ along with the ‘Ten Principles of Risk Management,’¹⁵ set out the national police standard for managing the risk to police forces

^{13*} At the time of authoring

¹⁴ Possibilities that cannot be excluded, but cannot be specified either

¹⁵ College of Policing, 2024

within England and Wales. Within this framework of practice, WMP expressed concern that the cumulative burden of mitigation – transport escorts, enhanced stewarding, segregated egress, and protest management capacity – might exceed operational tolerance if disorder materialised simultaneously at multiple points.

On that basis, senior officials advised that safe management of a substantial away cohort could not be guaranteed, particularly if hostile protest activity materialised along travel routes. The option to recommend the prohibition of visiting supporters was framed as precautionary rather than punitive.

Engagement with Israel

The initial interaction between West Midlands Police and Maccabi Tel Aviv took place during the UEFA meeting in Budapest on the 2nd and 3rd September 2025. The Head of the Football Policing Unit represented WMP at this conference, which brought together all participating football clubs and police representatives involved in the three UEFA competitions.¹⁶ During this conference, Maccabi Tel Aviv representatives expressed concerns regarding the fixture with Aston Villa, citing potential risks of disorder linked to community tensions.¹⁷

During this meeting, representatives discussed away supporter logistics and security, which included potential escorting of coaches from London. The use of pyrotechnics by ultras was also discussed, with agreement that strong advice and clear guidance would need to be communicated to supporters to assist with mitigating the risks.

After the UEFA conference, attempts to engage with the Israeli police were facilitated by the UKFPU, with contact being made through the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO).¹⁸ Two requests were made on 23rd September and 25th September, with no details supplied to either of these requests. However, it is important to note that this is not unusual in countries where there is not an established NFIP.¹⁹ On 23rd October 2025, UKFPU confirmed that no Israeli policing delegation had been identified or had plans to attend the fixture.

On the 29th October 2025, Chief Constable Guildford received an email on behalf of the Charge D'affaires of the State of Israel - Daniela Grudsky Ekstein - to arrange a phone call with ACC O'Hara (Gold Commander) in order to discuss WMP's preparations ahead of the fixture. There was an initial conversation between Mrs Grudsky Ekstein and WMP Silver Command, where reassurance was provided to ensure the team's safety. A subsequent discussion on the 3rd November confirmed arrangements for Mrs Grudsky Ekstein to visit Birmingham for the 6th November, where WMP were thanked for the management of the event security.

Aston Villa Football Club decisions

Under UEFA regulations, Aston Villa retains responsibility for match safety, but operates within a multi-agency framework overseen by the local Safety Advisory Group. Home clubs have dual obligations:

¹⁶ Champions League, Europa League, and Europa Conference League

¹⁷ West Midlands Police Accountability and Governance Board Report, 27th January 2026

¹⁸ UKFPU does not have a National Football Information Point (NFIP) contact in Israel

¹⁹ The NFIP is a group consisting of government and football policing experts, responsible for police cooperation relating to football matches with an international dimension

- To facilitate attendance by visiting supporters
- To maintain safety and order in cooperation with local police ²⁰

Aston Villa's safety group reviewed the assessment of West Midlands Police alongside their own operational plans, with key questions surrounding duty of care, and the feasibility of guaranteeing safety from arrival to dispersal. Club officials are accustomed to complex segregation operations and have experience hosting high-profile, domestic matches. What distinguishes this fixture was the movement phase: airports, rail approaches, city centre congregation, transfers to the stadium, and dispersal.

According to their subsequent statements, Aston Villa considered a spectrum of options:

- Increased stewarding
- Revised ticket distribution
- Stricter entry controls
- Controlled movement of opposition supporters

It was deemed that the club could not confidently assure safe corridors. Once articulated in those terms, the residual risk effectively transferred from policing to the club's own safety obligations. A pragmatic logic followed. If West Midlands Police cannot guarantee safe transit, then Aston Villa Football Club cannot confidently host the fixture.

Local authority decision making

The Birmingham County Council Safety Advisory Group (SAG) ²¹ considered the emerging situation with the objective "to discuss concerns honestly and to formulate a plan," with minutes indicating concern about city centre pressures, possible protest spill over, and the reputation consequences of disorder in a European competition. They met on the following dates:

- 7th October 2025
- 16th October 2025
- 24th October 2025

Safety Advisory Groups are designed to create checks and shared ownership. In practice, it tends to endorse police advice where risks are framed as potentially catastrophic. In meetings preceding the decision, the SAG considered:

- Projected crowd flows
- Choke points near Villa Park
- Contingency plans for disorder away from the ground

²⁰ UEFA Security and Safety Regulations, 2019

²¹ Representatives – 2 x SAG (lead, support); 8 x Birmingham City Council (BCC) (resilience, environmental, community safety, health and safety, licensing, highways, Cllr Mumtaz Hussein, Cllr Waseem Zaffar); 7 x West Midlands Police, 1 x British Transport Police, 2 x West Midlands Ambulance Service, 2 x West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service, 3 x transport providers (Transport for West Midlands, New Street Station, National Highways); 1 x Sports Ground Safety Authority, 6 x Aston Villa Football Club; 2 x Traffic

- Medical and emergency egress scenarios

The threat rating was considered by a matrix that reflected intelligence gathered using the National Football Disorder Model, up to the 24th October 2025:

Risk category	Previous rating	Updated rating
<i>Spontaneous disorder</i>	High	High
<i>Antisocial behaviour</i>	High	High
<i>Protest</i>	High	High
<i>Risk to Muslim communities</i>	Medium	High
<i>Risk to Pro-Palestinian protesters</i>	Medium	High
<i>Risk to police officers deployed</i>	Medium	High
<i>Risk to away supporters</i>	High	Medium (pending review)
<i>Pre-planned disorder</i>	Medium	Medium
<i>Risk of crime</i>	Medium	Medium
<i>Risk to police legitimacy</i>	Medium	Medium
<i>Risk of city disruption</i>	Medium	Medium
<i>Overall risk level</i>	High	High

A combination of reputational sensitivity, concern about the visibility of disorder in an international broadcast setting, and the operational uncertainties described appear to have influenced the eventual conclusion. The prohibition was therefore presented as a collective, precautionary decision taken “in the interests of safety.” Within the publicly available minutes from three SAG meetings, although partially redacted, there is no evidence of explicit political direction. Nevertheless, police and club officials acknowledged in later testimony that broader public and political pressures formed part of the environment in which those judgements were reached.

What is evident, however, is senior councillors expressing worries about cohesion and reputational risk. They did not sign off operational orders; nevertheless, their interventions helped establish a tone of zero tolerance for disorder. The Independent Member of Parliament for Birmingham Perry Barr, Mr. Ayoub Khan, stated on the 20th October 2025: ²²

“...There has been a deliberate, disingenuous move by many to make this a matter of banning Jews, and to conflate matters of policing with those of religion... those who are not welcome in Aston, are the hooligans who have a long history of violence and vile racism...”

The Secretary of State²³ also made the following comments at the end of the debate:

“...Everyone in this House is entitled to strong opinions, but they are not entitled to a selective version of the facts. The Hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to point out that, among a minority of Maccabi Tel Aviv fans in the instance he raised [Amsterdam], there

²² Responding to the urgent question: to ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (Rt. Hon Lisa Nandy MP) if she will make a statement on the decision to ban Maccabi Tel Aviv fans from attending their fixture against Aston Villa

²³ The Rt. Hon. Lisa Nandy MP – Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport

was appalling behaviour which none of us would seek to condone... but there were attacks on those fans, and that has formed part of the assessment of risk that West Midlands Police have had to make... we have had to deal with this in this country for a very long time... we have found a way to police safely and effectively. It cannot be beyond our collective wit to do so in this case.”

Proportionality and alternatives considered ²⁴

Within decision making frameworks for high risk fixtures, policing within England and Wales escalates through a repertoire, including:

- Intelligence-led exclusion of known offenders
- Strict ticketing and identity checks
- Managed transport corridors
- Ring-fenced seating with reinforced segregation
- Enhanced search regimes
- Temporary dispersal powers around sensitive areas

In this case, five intervention options were considered by the SAG:

1. Allow fixture to proceed unrestricted (risk – high probability of serious disorder, significant risk to public safety, unacceptable risk level, unsafe and disproportionate)
2. Match played without spectators (risk – may reduce in stadium risk, but does not eliminate external risks, could be seen as punitive to Aston Villa supporters, considered disproportionate)
3. Only away supporters permitted (risk – contradicts intelligence, increases threat to the local community, operationally unfeasible and unjustified)
4. Only home supporters permitted (risk – most effective mitigation of identified threats in order to reduce hate crime, far right mobilisation, protest clashes, and community disruption)
5. Reduced away supporter allocation (risk – does not sufficiently reduce risk, intelligence suggests groups could incite violence, attract protests, mobilise far right support)

Therefore, it was concluded that “the only option that reduces the threat significantly is to have no Maccabi fans at all...” This was justified through precedent via other European fixtures: “Lazio fans banned from Ajax. Rangers’ fans banned from PSV Eindhoven. Frankfurt fans banned from Naples...”

Partners were then asked to evaluate the impact of each intervention on the risk profile, based on the updated intelligence presented by West Midlands Police, leading to a confirmation

²⁴ All information in this section is quoted directly from the SAG minutes dated: 24th October 2025

process, calling on each statutory partner individually.²⁵ There was agreement with all participatory bodies with an agreement to formally communicate decisions to Aston Villa Football Club, who responded by questioning whether SAG recommendations were advisory or directive.

The SAG line remains clear: “You can choose to follow the advice or not. If you chose not to, then it is up to the statutory partners to act accordingly.”

Benchmarking and potential reliance on proxy indicators

Due to the assessment relying substantially on context rather than specific threat data, identity-based proxies may have functioned indirectly: “Israeli supporters” as a category associated with elevated disorder risk due to the political climate in the Middle East.

The decision record does not frame this in terms of nationality or religion – it presents as safety management. The decision record also frames risk in terms of “event characteristics,” rather than identity, yet with the characteristic in question was an Israeli football club, the effect was to treat a group defined by nationality (and potentially, indirectly, by assumed religion) as carrying elevated risk by default.

From a reconstruction standpoint, it is important to note that:

- The core justification was contextual volatility, not behaviour of Maccabi supporters
- The decision nonetheless attached consequences to that identity.

Full prohibition is rare and typically follows either a) repeated historical disorder between the same clubs; or b) credible intelligence naming specific risk groups whose attendance cannot be safely managed.

Against that benchmark, this decision sits towards the exceptional end of the spectrum.

²⁵ West Midlands Ambulance Service, West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service, British Transport Police, BCC highways, BCC licencing, BCC resilience, BCC community safety, Transport, BCC health and safety, BCC city centre management

The analysis of risk, punishment and discrimination

Government witnesses have acknowledged that, whatever the internal rationale, the effect was to send a message that Jewish/Israeli supporters were unwelcome. Sarah Jones MP, Minister of State for Policing and Crime Prevention, stated the Prime Minister intervened because the decisions made risked conveying that Jewish people would not be welcome to come to this match.

This perception was widely felt within the Birmingham Jewish community and beyond; with Lord Mann describing the decision as having “caused tension” and anxiety amongst Jewish communities, even if the operational justification was different. The Home Affairs Select Committee, also heard on 1 December 2025, that perceptions – even where contested – can themselves alter the dynamics of community cohesion.

Even if operationally defensible, the decision had a foreseeable impact that touched directly on protected characteristics (religion and nationality). That triggers a heightened duty to demonstrate necessity, proportionality, and non-discrimination: with transparent, evidence-based reasoning.

Was the decision intelligence-led or risk averse?

West Midlands Police stressed repeatedly that the ban followed the outline of the ‘National Decision Model,’ was rooted in safety, and supported by peer review.²⁶ They cited intelligence from Dutch police commanders describing serious disorder around Maccabi fixtures and the need for thousands of officers to manage events.

However, the committee revealed critical weaknesses in the information chain:

1. A single conversation between a Chief Inspector and a Dutch commander became the decisive turning point – a fact acknowledged by the Chief Constable
2. The Silver Commander’s written assessment contained factual inaccuracies, including a reference to a fixture that never took place.²⁷
3. Several reported episodes from Amsterdam were misdated or exaggerated when checked against direct observation²⁸

Assistant Chief Constable O’Hara conceded that intelligence should have been run through the intelligence function for verification before submission to the SAG, and that this due diligence did not occur.

At the same time, the force relied heavily on Dutch warnings about ultras. Yet Lord Mann testified that Maccabi’s ultras group had decided not to travel, substantially altering the risk calculus.

²⁶ Op Parkmill Peer Review, V1.0 published to Chief Constable Guildford at 11:53hrs, 21st October 2025. V3.0 (HASC publication) at 16:30hrs, 5th January 2026

²⁷ Maccabi Tel Aviv vs West Ham United

²⁸ Reports that Palestinian flags were torn down on match day. One flag was damaged the day before

Taken together, the picture is of an escalating risk narrative built on partly contested intelligence, reinforced by professional caution and reputation fear, rather than an irrefutable threat picture.

What alternatives existed – and were they seriously contested?

The Home Affairs Select Committee evidence shows that less restrictive options were available and had been used widely elsewhere:

1. Early kick off to avoid overnight stays (proposed by Lord Mann and discussed at gold command level)
2. Coach only transport (escorted) with screening at departure points. This was described as “tried and tested” and is used routinely in high risk fixtures
3. Partial allocation reductions or staggered access arrangements identified as options still “on the table” shortly before the decision
4. Behind closed doors or venue relocation were also discussed within the decision space

Lord Mann’s evaluation was stark: the evidence appeared “fitted to a get a solution... because if you do not have Israeli fans, there is no conflict,” whereas standard separation tactics offered a workable alternative.

The force argued that such measures were considered, but ultimately judged insufficient. Yet, the fact that Maccabi Tel Aviv ultras were not travelling, that Aston Villa was logistically easy to manage, and that comparable fixtures had safely accommodated Israeli fans elsewhere, suggests that a fuller proportionality assessment might reasonably have led to a different balance.

Did nationality or religion operate as a proxy for risk?

The risk assessment treated “away fans” as a homogenous threat group, rather than distinguishing between specific individuals or sub-groups. The justification repeatedly returned to:

- Disorder by ultras elsewhere
- Anticipated reactions of local protestors
- The heightened political environment

The operational response however, applied blanket exclusion to all Israeli supporters – including those with no history of disorder and despite evidence that the principal high risk cohort was not travelling. Where risk cannot be grounded in targeted intelligence, blanket restrictions risk sliding into collective punishment – particularly problematic where those affected share a protected characteristic. Mrs Jones MP herself acknowledged the prohibition risked being read as excluding people because they were Jewish. By contrast, equality legislation in England and Wales, and policing standards of ethical practice emphasise individual assessment, the least restrictive means, and demonstrable necessity – not simply the avoidance of controversy.

Political pressure vs operation independence

The Committee examined whether political considerations influenced operational policing judgement. No evidence was presented of direct ministerial instruction, or improper interference in the decision making process by community leaders within Birmingham. Witnesses from West Midlands Police maintained that the ban was an operational judgement taken under the 'National Decision Model.'

However, the timeline demonstrates intense political and ministerial scrutiny both before and after the decision. In the period leading up to the ban, senior political figures sought reassurance about public order, community cohesion, and reputational risk. The Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands, Simon Foster, in particular queried the reliability and provenance of the Dutch intelligence as public criticism mounted.

Following the announcement of the prohibition, political reaction shifted. Sir Keir Starmer (PM), Shabana Mahmood (Home Office), and Lisa Nandy (DCMS) publicly distanced themselves from the decision, characterising it as wrong in principle because of the symbolic message it conveyed about Jewish inclusion, once again reiterating that antisemitism is not welcome within the UK. This reversal was driven less by new safety information than by concern over public perception, international reaction, and community impact.

An asymmetry is therefore observable:

- Before the ban, there was marked deference to operational independence, even as the evidential basis for the risk assessment was contested and incomplete
- After the ban, political actors intervened rhetorically and decisively, not on the grounds of disproven risk, but because of the reputational and symbolic consequences of the decision

This pattern suggests that reputational considerations operated alongside – and at times, more visibly than – threat assessment in shaping how decisions were framed, defended, and subsequently criticised.

In this context, it is relevant to note that sections of the media and public commentary have alleged that authorities were pandering to hostile or extremist elements by prohibiting Israeli [Jewish] supporters rather than confronting those who might target them. The Committee did not find evidence substantiating claims of capitulation to organised extremism. However, the prominence of such narratives underscores the degree to which political optics and public confidence became intertwined with operational judgements.

The significance for this report is not whether such claims are accurate, but that decision makers were operating in an environment where symbolic outcomes carried heavy political cost. That environment increases the risk that public order decisions drift from intelligence-led necessity toward defensive reputational management, particularly where the anticipated disorder would be politically sensitive rather than operationally unmanageable.

Fallout, consequences, and secondary effects arising from the decisions made

Analytically, this is distinct from earlier chapters, which set out the factual chronology, operational decision making, and formal roles of the relevant authorities. The purpose here is not to re-evaluate the operational merits of the decision, but to analyse the secondary and tertiary consequences that emerged once the decision entered the public, parliamentary, and regulatory domains.

For the purposes of this report, the term fallout is understood as the accumulated institutional, reputational, procedural, and governance effects that followed the decision, including effects that were not foreseeable at the point the decisions were taken.

These effects have been shaped not only by the substance of the decision itself, but by the subsequent processes of explanation, scrutiny, correction, and oversight.

This chapter therefore focuses on:

- The evolution of parliamentary scrutiny
- The integrity and contestation of information and evidence
- Regulatory escalation and inspection
- Reputational impacts across domestic and international contexts
- Organisational stress within policing and governance systems

Navigating the transition from operational decision making to a national political issue

A defining feature of the fallout that ensued was the speed and scale with which a localised operational decision became a matter of national political significance. Whilst the fixture concerned a single football fixture within a defined local authority area, the surrounding context – international conflict, community sensitivities, and media interest – meant that the decision rapidly attracted attention beyond the immediate operational environment.

Once the prohibition of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters became publicly known, the decision ceased to function solely as a risk mitigation measure and became a symbolic focal point for wider debates concerning policing, protest, antisemitism, public order, and civil liberties. This transformation is critical to understanding what happened next: altering both the audience to whom explanations were owed, and the standards against which those explanations are judged.

From this point onwards, the decision was no longer assessed purely in terms of:

- Proportionality to threat
- Or alignment with established football policing practice

But increasingly in terms of:

- Transparency
- Evidential robustness

- Procedural fairness
- Institutional legitimacy

Parliamentary escalation, political polarisation and the erosion of deference

Initial parliamentary engagement

The Home Affairs Select Committee on the 1st December 2025 marked the first formal parliamentary examination of the decision. At this stage, the Committee's approach was largely explanatory and contextual. Members sought to understand:

- How the decision was reached
- What intelligence and information informed the decisions made
- How responsibility was distributed between West Midlands Police and Birmingham City Council

Although concerns were raised regarding intelligence quality and proportionality, the prevailing assumption remained that the force had acted in good faith within a complex operational environment. This reflects a broader constitutional norm whereby operational policing decisions are afforded a degree of institutional deference, particularly where national security or public order considerations are invoked.

Intensification of scrutiny and the shift in tone

By the second session on the 6th January 2026, the nature of the parliamentary scrutiny had altered materially. The Committee adopted a markedly more forensic and adversarial posture, characterised by repeated challenges to:

- Inconsistencies between oral evidence and written documentation
- The absence of contemporaneous records for key meetings
- The disposal of handwritten notes
- Discrepancies between different accounts of the same events

Committee members openly expressed scepticism regarding the credibility of certain explanations, using language that signalled a breakdown in confidence. This shift was analytically significant, indicating that the Committee no longer regarded the matter as one requiring clarification, but rather one requiring verification and correction.

Consequences of parliamentary escalation

The fallout of this parliamentary escalation was multifaceted:

1. Prolonged visibility

The issue remained live well beyond the date of the fixture, with continued questioning, correspondence, and follow up evidence

2. Expansion of evidential demands

WMP was required to reconstruct decision making processes retrospectively, increasing exposure to criticism where documentation was incomplete

3. Reputational risk amplification

Parliamentary scepticism signalled to other institutions – including regulators and the media – that official accounts were contested

In effect, parliamentary scrutiny became a multiplier of fallout, intensifying other forms of consequence rather than merely reflecting them.

AI use and correction of the parliamentary record

The most accurate manifestation of this issue arose in relation to the use of digital tools in identifying historical fixtures involving Maccabi Tel Aviv. During oral evidence on 6th January 2026, assurances were given that artificial intelligence tools had not been used. Subsequent internal review established that Microsoft Copilot had been used, resulting in the erroneous inclusion of a West Ham fixture.

This led to a formal written correction and apology from WMP Chief Constable Craig Guildford on the 12th January 2026. The letter is noted for its careful tone:

- It explicitly acknowledges the error
- It confirms that the incorrect belief was honestly held
- It denies any intention to mislead parliament

Despite this measured response, the fallout was significant for a number of reasons:

1. Parliamentary trust was weakened, as assurances given under oath were retrospectively qualified
2. The episode highlighted a governance gap regarding AI assisted tools, including understanding of their outputs and disclosure obligations
3. The necessity of a corrective letter prolonged scrutiny and embedded the issue further into the official record

Importantly, this fallout was not primarily about the technical use of AI, but about epistemic confidence: parliament's ability to rely on the accuracy and completeness of police evidence in a contested environment.

Regulatory fallout: HMICFRS inspection and system level implications: Inspection triggering

The prohibition and its aftermath prompted the commissioning – on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Home Department – of an HMICFRS inspection into police contributions to Safety Advisory Groups, with particular focus on WMP's role in the Aston Villa fixture. This represents a critical point in the fallout, as it evaluated the issue from parliamentary scrutiny to formal regulatory oversight.

Preliminary findings and their significance

In his letter, made publicly available on 14 January 2026, HM Chief Inspector Sir Andy Cook identified several areas of concern, including:

- Inaccuracies in written material submitted to the SAG
- Lack of balance in the portrayal of supporter behaviour
- Evidence of confirmation bias influencing assessments

The inspector emphasised that his role was not to investigate individual misconduct, however, the identification of these issues at an interim stage of enquiry had immediate consequences: it reinforced parliamentary concerns, it signalled potential systemic weaknesses, and it excluded uncertainty pending final conclusions.

Broader governance fallout

The inspection had implications beyond WMP:

- Raises questions about national consistency in SAG processes
- Highlights the vulnerability of local governance mechanisms when exposed to high profile political controversy
- Underscores the reputational risk faced by forces when local decisions acquire national significance

In this sense, HMICFRS intervention constituted fallout not merely for WMP, but for the wider policing system.

Reputational considerations and the management of public confidence - Domestic reputational impacts

Official documentation repeatedly references the scale of public and media interest surrounding the decision. Sir Andy Cook's report explicitly acknowledges the existence of widespread media reporting and the risk of misinterpretation or conflation of evidence. As a result, there is diminished confidence within some communities, heightened sensitivity to policing decisions involving international issues, and increased scepticism regarding official narratives.

International and diplomatic dimensions

The involvement of diplomatic actors, including the Israeli Embassy, underscores the extent to which the fallout extended beyond domestic policing considerations. The decision was perceived, in some areas, as carrying symbolic implications regarding the treatment of Israeli nationals and Jewish communities.

Whilst the operational decision was taken within local legal framework, its fallout was shaped by international perception, further complicating efforts to contextualise, or contain the issue.

A key analytical distinction emerges between:

- Reputational impacts arising from the ban itself; and

- Reputational impacts arising from subsequent contestation, correction, and review

The latter proved more enduring, as prolonged scrutiny sustained public attention and amplified perceptions of institutional fragility.

Retrospective scrutiny and systemic implications

Parliamentary evidence revealed several features indicative of organisational strain:

- Absence of contemporaneous minutes
- Reliance on later reconstructions
- Disposal of handwritten notes after transcription

Such practices may be unremarkable in routine operational contexts, but become highly consequential under retrospective scrutiny. The fallout here lay not in the existence of gaps per se, but in the interpretation once subjected to parliamentary and regulatory examination. In the absence of complete records, decision makers were required to rely on memory and professional judgement, increasing exposure to challenge and scepticism.

This dynamic illustrates how process vulnerabilities can become amplified when decisions attract national attention.

Taken together, the fallout from the prohibition of away supporters was cumulative and mutually reinforcing:

- Parliamentary scrutiny intensified regulatory interest
- Regulatory findings reinforced reputational concerns
- Reputational damage increased organisational stress
- Organisational stress, in turn, weakened confidence in the processes and evidence

This feedback loop consequently demonstrates how high-profile policing decisions can generate systemic effects that persist independently of the original operational context.

The limitations of operational independence

Operational independence protects policing from political direction in individual cases. In this instance, there is no evidence that ministers sought to direct or override the operational decision to prohibit Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters. The decision remained, formally and substantively, within the remit of West Midlands Police and the Safety Advisory Group framework.

However, the fallout demonstrates that operational independence does not insulate policing decisions from political consequence. Once the decision generated national controversy, ministers became accountable not for the decision itself, but for:

- The adequacy of governance processes
- The reliability of information provided to decision makers
- The capacity of the policing system to correct itself where errors or inconsistencies emerged

Ministerial confidence, verification, and the turn to independent oversight

The commissioning of the HMICFRS inspection represents a significant moment within this asymmetry, indicating the point at which ministerial reliance on internal assurances was no longer sufficient. Independent verification was now required to restore public confidence – not necessarily in the outcome of the decision, but in the system’s ability to account for it.

This should not read as a loss of confidence in any individual office holder, rather reflecting:

- a. the political reality that ministers must demonstrate effective oversight
- b. the necessity of independent inspection as a mechanism for restoring legitimacy
- c. the limits of informal assurance in contexts of heightened public concern

This episode illustrates how parliamentary asymmetry – whilst stable in theory – can generate secondary fallout when decisions intersect with international sensitivities, evidence becomes contested, and public confidence becomes a political issue.

The creation of a reference case

The Aston Villa vs Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture has now entered the institutional memory of policing and governance as a reference case. It is repeatedly cited in:

- Parliamentary evidence
- Regulatory correspondence
- Professional discourse concerning football policing and public order

As a reference case, it functions less as an example of best practice of failure, and more as a cautionary illustration of how operational decisions can escalate into national controversies.

Precedent without policy

Notably, none of these effects require formal guidance, legislative change, or ministerial direction to take hold. Instead, they arise through:

- Professional learning
- Reputational memory
- Rational anticipation of scrutiny

This makes them difficult to quantify, but no less real. The case thus exemplifies how fallout can persist long after formal processes conclude, shaping institutional behaviour in subtle but durable ways.

Preliminary findings

The findings set out below are drawn from the factual, contextual, and comparative analysis presented in the preceding sections of this report. They assess the decision to prohibit Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters from attending the UEFA Europa League fixture at Aston Villa against established standards of public order policing, proportionality, equality, and governance in England and Wales.

The findings focus on the quality and use of evidence, the decision making process, and the foreseeable consequences of the measures adopted. They do not attribute intent, determine individual culpability, or assess criminal liability.

These findings are made in the context of widespread media reporting, some of which continues to conflate elements of the evidence available. There appears to be a considerable amount of new information emerging almost weekly and it is highly probable that this will continue to occur over the next months. The findings of this report are therefore subject to change.

1. The decision to prohibit Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters was based primarily on contextual risk rather than event specific intelligence

The evidence reviewed indicates that the risk assessment underpinning the prohibition relied heavily on generalised contextual factors – including the wider geopolitical climate, anticipated protest activity, and extrapolation from disorder at a previous overseas fixture – rather than specific, verifiable intelligence relating to identifiable individuals, groups, or planned actions connected with the Aston Villa fixture.

No publicly evidenced intelligence demonstrated imminent, coordinated, or unmanageable disorder directly attributable to travelling Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters in Birmingham. This finding aligns with the conclusion of Sir Andy Cook that the West Midlands Police assessment was influenced by a confirmation bias and an imbalance in the weight of evidence presented to the Safety Advisory Group.

2. Inaccuracies and exaggerations in the presentation of overseas disorder materially affected the assessment of risk

The report finds that accounts of the November 2024 Amsterdam disorder, as presented in written material to the SAG, contained factual inaccuracies, exaggerations, and conflation of sources. These included overstatements regarding the scale of violence, the conduct of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters, and the level of police deployment.²⁹

This overstating of the extent to which disorder in Amsterdam was attributable to Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters materially shaped the strength with which prohibition was advanced as the preferred tactical option, concurring with assessments and recent discoveries that such distortions reduced the scope for meaningful consideration of less restrictive alternatives.

²⁹ Claims over 600 Maccabi supporters intentionally targeted Muslim communities, tore down multiple Palestinian flags, seriously assaulted Muslim taxi drivers, and threw innocent members of the public into the canal

3. The prohibition represented an exceptional departure from established football policing practice

Blanket, pre-emptive exclusion of away supporters is rare within English football and is ordinarily reserved for circumstances involving acute, match-specific intelligence indicating an unmanageable risk of serious disorder. Comparable high risk fixtures are typically managed through graduated, intelligence-led measures including targeted exclusions, controlled transport, segregation, and enhanced policing.

In this case, the decision to prohibit away supporters constituted a departure from those operational norms. The evidence does not demonstrate that less restrictive measures were exhausted or rendered unviable by specific intelligence. This is echoed by the Rt. Hon. The Lord Mann and Sir Andy Cook.

4. The evidential threshold for necessity and proportionality was not met

Given the absence of event-specific threat intelligence, the non-attendance of identified high risk supporter groups, and the availability of established mitigation measures, the report finds that the necessity of a total prohibition was clearly not demonstrated.

Whilst public authorities are entitled to act on precautionary grounds, proportionality requires that restrictions on lawful participation in public events be the least intrusive means capable of achieving the legitimate aim of public safety. The evidence reviewed does not establish that this test was satisfied in this instance.

5. The decision had foreseeable equality and community impact implications that were insufficiently weighed

Although no evidence has been found that antisemitism motivated the decision, the practical effect of the prohibition was to exclude a group defined by nationality and closely associated, in public perception, with a protected religious identity.

This concurs with Sir Andy Cook's identified shortcomings regarding engagement with the local Jewish community and acknowledged warnings about the likely community impact of a prohibition were not adequately incorporated into decision making processes. This report finds that the foreseeable perception of collective exclusion was insufficiently weighed against the asserted preliminary safety benefits.

6. Governance, documentation, and intelligence handling deficiencies weakened the robustness of the decision making process

This report finds significant weaknesses in record keeping, intelligence validation, and documentation. This includes the disposal of contemporaneous notes, the circulation of unvalidated intelligence, and the absence of a declared critical incident framework.

These deficiencies, including the admission of AI assisted intelligence gathering, undermined the reliability of the material placed before the Safety Advisory Group and reduced institutional resilience once the decision became subject to parliamentary and public scrutiny.

7. The decision created adverse precedent and secondary risks beyond the immediate fixture

Beyond the immediate operational context, the prohibition generated substantial reputational, governance, and confidence related consequences. These included parliamentary escalation, regulatory intervention, and heightened anxiety within Jewish communities regarding the participation in public life.

This report finds that insufficient foresight was applied to these wider consequences, with West Midlands Police failing to anticipate the long term and global repercussions of the decision.

Conclusions

This chapter draws together the findings of the report to reach a reasoned judgement on the decision to prohibit Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters from attending the UEFA Europa League fixture against Aston Villa. It assesses the decision against established principles governing public order policing, proportionality, equality, and participation in public life within England and Wales.

These conclusions do not seek to attribute intent, determine individual culpability, or substitute the judgement of operational commanders. Rather, they assess whether the decision, as taken and justified, met the standards reasonably expected of public authorities when exercising exceptional powers that restrict lawful participation in a major civic event.

Overall judgements

Taken as a whole, the report concludes that the decision to prohibit Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters was not sufficiently justified by the evidence available, and that the threshold for such exceptional and collective restriction was not clearly met.

Whilst the concerns articulated by West Midlands Police and partner agencies were genuine and were formed within a challenging operational and political environment, the decision ultimately rested on a risk-averse and precautionary logic that displaced the established preference for targeted, intelligence led mitigation. In doing so, it departed from normal procedure without demonstrating that lesser measures were inadequate or unworkable.

The subsequent reliance on AI-assisted analytical products, without clear disclosure of their methodology, limitations, or validation, further weakens the evidential foundation on which such an exceptional restriction was imposed. In circumstances where lawful participation in a major civic event was curtailed on a collective basis, the absence of demonstrable safeguards and human-led verification is a significant deficiency.

In addition, inaccurate or incomplete representations made in the course of parliamentary scrutiny – regardless of intent – undermine the accountability mechanisms that are essential when extraordinary powers are exercised. This, in turn, compounds concerns about whether the decisions made in Birmingham met the standards reasonably expected of public authorities.

Necessity

The prohibition was presented as necessary to protect public safety and prevent disorder. However, the evidence reviewed does not demonstrate that the presence of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters posed an imminent or unmanageable threat that could not reasonably have been mitigated through established policing measures.

The assessment relied predominantly on contextual volatility, extrapolation from overseas disorder, and anticipated reactions by third parties, rather than on event-specific intelligence identifying concrete threats linked to the fixture itself. In the absence of such intelligence, the necessity of a total prohibition was clearly not established.

Proportionality

Even where heightened risk exists, proportionality requires that restrictions be no more intrusive than necessary to achieve the legitimate aim of public safety.

This report concludes that a blanket prohibition on all away supporters represented a disproportionate response, given the availability of alternative measures routinely used in high risk fixtures, including:

- Controlled transport
- Reduced allocations
- Targeted exclusions
- Enhanced stewarding
- Dynamic policing

The evidence does not demonstrate that these options were exhausted or rendered ineffective by specific intelligence.

Equality and the collective impact on the Jewish community

Although no finding is made that antisemitism motivated the decision, this report concludes that the collective impact of the prohibition engaged serious equality considerations.

In practice, the decision excluded a group defined by nationality and closely associated, in public perception, with a protected religious identity. The foreseeable effect was to convey – irrespective of intent – that Jewish or Israeli supporters were unwelcome or uniquely problematic.

This report finds that this impact was insufficiently weighed against the asserted safety benefits, despite warnings from community representatives, that such a perception was likely. This is strengthened by the fact the Jewish community in Birmingham, as per Sir Andy Cook's report states, were not consulted throughout the decision making process.

Governance and decision making standards

This report further concludes that weaknesses in intelligence handling, evidential validation, record keeping, and community engagement materially weakened the robustness of the decision making process.

These shortcomings reduced the ability of the Safety Advisory Group to challenge assumptions, narrowed the range of options meaningfully considered, and increased the likelihood that an exceptional measure would be accepted as inevitable. Once the decision became subject to public and parliamentary scrutiny, these process deficiencies amplified reputational and institutional consequences.

Wider consequences and precedent

Beyond the immediate fixture, this report concludes that the decision generated significant secondary effects, including:

- Parliamentary escalation
- Regulatory intervention
- Community anxiety
- Damage to public confidence

Importantly, the prohibition has now entered institutional memory as a reference case. Without clear articulation of the conditions under which such measures are justified, there is a risk that exceptional restrictions may be normalised in future contexts involving politically sensitive identities, rather than treated as a last resort grounded in demonstrable and specific threat.

Concluding assessments

In summary, this report concludes that:

- The decision was taken in good faith but on an evidential basis that was incomplete and, in parts, overstated
- The necessity and proportionality thresholds required for a blanket prohibition were not clearly met
- The collective impact on the Jewish community in the United Kingdom was foreseeable and insufficiently addressed
- The process by which the decision was reached lacked the robustness expected for an exceptional measure

Taken together, these factors indicate that the prohibition of Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters cannot be regarded as fully consistent with established standards for public order management, equality, and inclusive participation in civic life.

Considerations for future practice

These recommendations are intentionally framed at a strategic level, recognising the operational discretion of policing bodies and local authorities. They are offered to assist future decision making relating to high risk sporting events, particularly where public order considerations intersect with politically sensitive identities and protected characteristics.

1. Clarify the evidential threshold for collective supporter prohibitions

Public authorities involved in football safety governance should ensure that blanket prohibitions on supporter attendance are explicitly recognised as exceptional measures, requiring a clearly articulated evidential threshold.

Where such measures are contemplated, decision records should demonstrate:

- The presence of event specific intelligence indicating an unmanageable risk
- Why targeted or graduated mitigations are insufficient
- How necessity and proportionality have been tested and recorded

This would ensure consistency with standard operating procedures and reduce the risk of exceptional measures becoming normalised in politically sensitive contexts.

2. Strengthen intelligence validation and challenge mechanisms within SAG processes

Police forces should ensure that all intelligence and information presented to Safety Advisory Groups:

- Has passed through dedicated intelligence structures
- Has been appropriately validated and caveated
- Is clearly distinguished from contextual background or professional judgement

SAG members should be supported and encouraged to challenge assumptions, particularly where recommended options involve significant restrictions on lawful participation. This may include clearer documentation of alternative options considered and rejected.

3. Improve contemporaneous record keeping for high impact decisions

For decisions likely to attract significant public, parliamentary, or legal scrutiny, forces and partner agencies should adopt enhanced standards of contemporaneous documentation, including:

- Retention or original notes from key external briefings
- Clear audit trails showing how information evolves
- Accurate recording of the rationale for rejecting less intrusive options

Improved record keeping would strengthen institutional resilience and reduce the need for retrospective reconstruction under scrutiny.

4. Embed early and balanced community engagement in risk assessment

Where decisions may disproportionately impact identifiable communities. Early engagement with local representative bodies should be embedded within planning processes.

Such engagement should:

- Occur before preferred tactical options are advanced
- Be clearly distinguished from national or regional consultation
- Be reflected meaningfully in community impact assessments

This would support more balanced assessments of risk, perception, and consequence, and help avoid avoidable harm to community confidence.

5. Explicitly consider equality and perception impacts alongside safety objectives

Decision makers should ensure that equality and non-discrimination considerations are not treated as secondary or reputational issues, but as integral components of risk assessment.

Where measures may reasonably be perceived as collective exclusion based on nationality, religion, or identity, decision records should show:

- That such impacts were anticipated
- How they were weighed against asserted safety benefits
- What steps were considered to mitigate those impacts

This would align public order decision making more closely with equality principles and ethical policing standards.

6. Improve consistency and balance in internal and external communications

Where decisions rest on multiple risk factors – including protest dynamics, third party threats, and contextual volatility – public and internal communications should accurately reflect that complexity.

Over emphasis on the behaviour of a single group risk:

- Distorting public understanding
- Undermining confidence in policing impartiality
- Creating avoidable community tension

Clear, balanced communication would support legitimacy even where decisions are contested.

7. Establish escalation and oversight triggers for politically sensitive fixtures

For fixtures carrying significant political, international, or community sensitivity, forces should consider adopting clearer escalation mechanisms. These include:

- Early consideration of critical incident frameworks

- Earlier involvement of senior oversight bodies where reputational or confidence risks are foreseeable
- Exploration of additional funding or specialist resources before discounting mitigation options

Such mechanisms would help ensure that exceptional decisions are taken with full awareness of their broader implications.



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The London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism (LCSCA) is part of a worldwide network of antisemitism scholarship. It works to build and to sustain this academic community and the scholarly infrastructure that it needs: conferences, publishing platforms, research funding and the mentorship of younger scholars.

Antisemitism scholarship maps and describes the growing and changing phenomenon of contemporary antisemitism and it develops ways of understanding it and vocabularies for talking about it.

LCSCA academics see antisemitism as one of a number of related social structures of unjust discrimination and exclusion, yet they also maintain a focus on the specifics of antisemitism and on the way it tends to be marginalized, or worse, inside the academic disciplines.

The Centre fosters academic research. Sometimes its practical impact is unpredictable, but other times its knowledge production is tailored to serve the needs of policy makers, the institutions of the Jewish community, activists and the increasing number of public and private bodies that find themselves having to address contemporary antisemitism in a practical and immediate way.

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