

Why banning of Maccabi fans raises questions about police integrity



PA MEDIA

Lucy Manning

Special correspondent

14 January 2026

When a police force is supposed to seek the truth and uphold the law, what happens when the evidence they present to officials and the public is, as Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood put it, "exaggerated or untrue"?

The police inspectorate has concluded the leaders of West Midlands Police fell foul of "confirmation bias". In simple terms, that means senior officers had already reached a decision and were looking for intelligence to justify it.

The list of errors and inaccuracies set out in an independent review of the decision-making that led to fans of Israeli football club Maccabi Tel Aviv being banned from attending a fixture at Villa Park in November have been described by Mahmood as "damning".

They include: A report of a football match in an intelligence report produced using AI which never happened; a twice-repeated denial by senior police leaders to MPs that AI had not been relied on to produce the inaccurate report; the claim that local Jewish groups had been consulted on the move when they had not been; inaccurately presenting evidence from Dutch police reports from a previous fixture involving the club.

This is about a police force that has been accused by MPs of misrepresenting evidence, bending it to make it fit a pre-determined decision, while ignoring evidence that could have presented a different picture.

It led to Israeli and some British-Jewish fans being banned from attending a football match, when the intelligence the police had actually gathered suggested they were *at* risk, not *the* risk.

West Midlands Police was, as Nick Timothy MP - who has led some of the criticism of the force - put it, "gaslighting them".

On Wednesday, the force said it would "work tirelessly" to rebuild confidence and that it was "extremely sorry" mistakes had been made, but not with "an intent of deliberate distortion or discrimination".



HOUSE OF COMMONS

On Wednesday, Shabana Mahmood said she no longer had confidence in the chief constable of West Midlands Police

When Aston Villa were drawn to play Maccabi Tel Aviv last August, tensions around the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza were running high nationally.

There were demands from some in the Birmingham community that the Israeli team should be banned from playing or their fans barred from attending.

In October 2025, a group made up of local officials, including the police and council, and tasked with making decisions about security at public events, decided the game was high-risk and banned away fans.

It was a decision Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and others condemned, saying the role of the police was to ensure all football fans could enjoy the game without fear of violence. "We will not tolerate antisemitism," he said.

If it was not for some dogged reporting by journalists, including at the Sunday Times, and hard questioning from MPs the truth would never have come to light.

There had been problems with Maccabi Tel Aviv before, including clashes between the club's fans and Dutch supporters at a match in Amsterdam in 2024.

As reported by the Guardian, West Midlands Police said intelligence gathered from a Dutch police report showed Maccabi fans had thrown Muslims into a

river, that 5,000 Dutch officers were needed to police the game, and Israeli fans had intentionally targeted Muslim communities.

In fact, Dutch police told the Sunday Times it was not all true.

Wednesday's report confirms inaccuracies and exaggerations despite being there "a significant level of disorder" around the fixture. It was, in fact, a Maccabi fan who was found in the river and 1,200 officers were deployed. It also found that Israeli fans did not intentionally target Muslim communities, though some individual Muslims and pro-Palestinians were.

There were reports of hundreds of Israeli fans pulling down Palestinian flags and chanting against Arabs - but Dutch police evidence recorded just three incidents involving flags, and also instances of Dutch locals ambushing and attacking Israeli fans.

Earlier this month, West Midlands Police Chief Constable Craig Guildford was called to give evidence to the home affairs select committee for a second time. MPs had been less than impressed with his first appearance.

Guildford denied there was any conspiracy to ban Maccabi fans.

But MPs were astonished to discover that information gathered before the scheduled match in Birmingham contained "high confidence intelligence" about "elements of the community in [the] West Midlands wanting to 'arm' themselves" and target Maccabi fans.

Asked why this information had not been made public, the chief constable said to the consternation of MPs that it was because "he wasn't asked about it" before.



REUTERS

Maccabi Tel Aviv fans at a football game

Questioned about any political pressure he came under, the police chief said the force had spoken to the local independent MP Ayoub Khan, who had called for the game to be cancelled or relocated, and had consulted local mosques about the decision. He said the force would speak to MPs all the time.

It also transpired that two councillors who opposed the fixture sat on the group which took the decision to ban away fans.

Khan told the Commons on Wednesday that the force had "never caved into community pressure" and described calls for Guildford to be sacked as a "witch hunt".

But the home secretary was clear she believes this episode has damaged community relations, while the report criticises the force for not consulting the local Jewish community before coming to a decision.

West Midlands Police tried to explain the lack of consultation away by saying it was out of respect for the Jewish festival days around the time the decision was being made.

On that, the head of the police inspectorate is unequivocal in his report, writing: "I don't accept this."

Jewish community organisations have felt let down by police forces nationally since the period after the 7 October attacks.

They believe the police have been too timid in confronting the verbal and physical threats they have faced, and think the threat posed to Jews by violent Islamists needs to be tackled more forcefully.

The government's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, Jonathan Hall KC, said on Tuesday that he had "lost count of the times that hatred against Israelis has been stirred up on British streets", and that "the demonisation of Israelis matters because it is a vehicle for hatred of Jews".

The report into the West Midlands Police finds there was no evidence to support the view that antisemitism played any part in the force's decision to ban Maccabi fans.

However, it concluded the force overstated the threat posed by the Israeli fans and understated the risk posed to them.

As **support ebbs away from the chief constable**, how the decision to ban Maccabi fans was taken has revealed problems around inaccurate intelligence, the bungled use of AI, and failure to consult the community they police.

In other words, this is not about a football match - it is about the integrity of British policing.

Related topics

[Policing](#)

[West Midlands Police](#)

[Home Office](#)

Top stories

[Starter accuses Musk of trying to whip up division over Henry Nowak murder](#)

32 minutes ago

[Henry Nowak inquest to probe actions of police](#)

1 hour ago

[Breakthrough ovarian cancer drug offers patients more time and better quality of life](#)

12 hours ago

More to explore



What a hair loss breakthrough could mean for women like me



'I left a children's home – and was embraced by love'



Breakthrough ovarian cancer drug offers patients more time and better quality of life



Pupils' upcycling scheme helps lower cost of prom



Queen presents medal to seriously ill boy who asked if she had dragon in her castle



Molly-Mae Hague and Tommy Fury welcome second child



Mum 'speechless' as strangers transform her home



Our estate was labelled a war zone after the riot - but the reality is very different



Politics Essential: Get the latest news and analysis delivered to your inbox every weekday

Most read

- 1 Harry and Meghan celebrate Lilibet's fifth birthday
- 2 Starmer accuses Musk of trying to whip up division over Henry Nowak murder
- 3 Teenager given life sentence for knife murder while on bail for slashing
- 4 Bob Harris to step down from Radio 2 after 56 years on air
- 5 Exams watchdog warns of rise in high-tech cheating
- 6 Missing Mandelson messages from minister Darren Jones revealed
- 7 What a hair loss breakthrough could mean for women like me
- 8 'I lost thousands in savings and my partner's money is in limbo'
- 9 NHS staff should be banned from wearing pro-Palestinian badges, report recommends
- 10 Henry Nowak inquest to probe actions of police

BBC News Services



On your mobile



On smart speakers

 Get news alerts

 Contact BBC News

Best of the BBC



Catch up on all episodes of the fresh series

 iPlayer

 Watchlist



Andrew Malkinson and the justice system that failed him

 Sounds

 Subscribe



The competition returns with bolder rooms and bigger risks

 iPlayer

 Watchlist



The special bond between twin sisters is tested to the limit

 Sounds

 Subscribe

Home

Sport

iPlayer

Bitesize

News

Weather

Sounds

CBBC

[CBeebies](#)

[Food](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[About the BBC](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Cookies](#)

[Accessibility Help](#)

[Parental Guidance](#)

[Contact the BBC](#)

[Make an editorial complaint](#)

[BBC emails for you](#)

Copyright © 2026 BBC. The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites. [Read about our approach to external linking.](#)