

UK police to use live rounds, plastic bullets and water cannon in future riots

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Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has recommended that police should be able to use water cannon, rubber bullets and live firearms during any future UK riots.

"The Rules of Engagement: A review of the August 2011 disorders" was commissioned by the home secretary following the riots this summer. It endorses the use of these weapons in certain situations, giving the example of "Arson attacks on commercial buildings with linkage to residential dwellings" as a situation in which police can shoot people deemed to be involved.

The report reveals that discussions have been held regarding a role for the military. Although stating, "It is difficult at present to conceive of a purely public order situation in which the level of force for which the military are currently trained in and equipped to use would be justified", the HMIC adds the military could be used "to take over logistical roles to free police officers for public order duties".

While calling for the stepping up of state repression against the population, the report pays scant attention to the fact that the immediate trigger for the riots was the shooting dead by a police CO19 Special Firearms Unit of Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old unarmed man, in Tottenham, London, on August 4.

Family and friends of Duggan, as well as local residents, organised a peaceful protest to demand answers outside Tottenham police station on Saturday August 6. The protest was attacked by police, which was the immediate trigger for the riots.

The HMIC report lists a series of scenarios in which various weapons could be used in future episodes of disorder. It suggests that plastic bullets, described as "attenuating energy projectiles (AEPs)", could be used to respond to barricades being set up and missiles being thrown by protesters.

The report notes that as of yet no police force in the mainland UK has access to water cannon, but that they could be used in various scenarios, including against the building of barricades. Up to now, water cannon have only ever been used by the police and army in Northern Ireland during its decades-long occupation by British troops.

Under conditions of mounting social anger and increasing police brutality, expressed in the response to the killing of Duggan, the report is careful to note the social dangers of a turn to such methods of direct repression. It poses the question of the "consequences" of the use of high levels of force—i.e., the potential for escalation by rioters, and community reaction.

"In this vein, the first use of AEPs or water cannon in public order on mainland UK will be intensely scrutinised. It will certainly enter the history books, but it will also enter the enduring memory of the affected communities."

A central consideration of the HMIC in making its recommendations is that the necessary tools of state repression be in place for the Olympic Games, which are to be held in London in the summer of next year.

The report states, "HMIC has found previously that it can take two years or more for agreed changes in public order tactics to become reality on the front line. This pace is too slow—especially with the Olympics less than a year away. We therefore recommend that alternative routes to effecting change are considered. *One approach could involve focusing initially on making changes in forces that police higher risk, urban areas; but in the longer term, all forces would need to adopt the new practices, so that they are able to contribute to any national requirement*" (emphasis added).

The *World Socialist Web Site* has previously noted the unprecedented level of police-state measures being

put into place, in the run-up to the Games (see “2012 Olympics: Police-state measures for London as super-wealthy party”). The HMIC report makes clear that this event is to be used to make permanent changes to UK policing.

Seeking to justify ever-greater powers of repression, the report states, “Officers and their commanders took action to bring disorder to an end. However, we found that some were uncertain about the level of force and tactics that can be used lawfully during disorder.”

Police officers “erred on the safe side, using less forceful tactics, and standing their ground rather than going forward to tackle disorder, as they waited for arrival of reinforcements which would allow them to tackle disorder through weight of officer numbers,” the report finds.

In fact, the response of the government *at the time*, as stated by Prime Minister David Cameron himself, was to authorise the use of water cannon and plastic bullets and the possible use of the army against any further social unrest. In addition, some 16,000 police officers were eventually mobilised in London, locking the capital down and placing it under siege.

Since then, more than 3,500 arrests have been made, with many people charged and jailed for the most trivial offences, including those not even involved in the disturbances. The arrests are continuing with reports that, on December 21, the Metropolitan Police raided 100 homes across London. The raids, the largest single operation against those suspected of involvement in August’s riots, resulted in more than 80 arrests.

The report is so far-reaching that it has even been presented by a compliant media as fundamentally challenging the notion of “policing by consent”. In truth, however, this notion has already been dispensed with by the ruling elite. The police are now able to operate as a law unto themselves, with the power to shoot to kill with impunity. And even prior to the publication of the HMIC report, the Metropolitan Police were deciding on whether to spend nearly £4 million on purchasing three water cannon.

Mark Duggan was one of hundreds of people killed by the police over the last decade. It was in the immediate aftermath of the July 2005 bombings that the young, innocent Brazilian worker Jean Charles de Menezes was brutally executed by a specialised armed police unit inside a London Underground station

carriage.

The campaign group Inquest found that between 1997 and 2007, there were more than 530 deaths in police custody in England and Wales. From 1990 to 2011, police shot dead 53 people, with 21 of the killings committed by the Metropolitan Police. Not a single police officer has been convicted in connection with these deaths.



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