

# Paratroopers readied for future social unrest in UK

Paul Stuart  
25 February 2012

Repressive techniques perfected in Northern Ireland are being deployed for the first time on the British mainland.

The *Daily Telegraph* has reported that soldiers from the elite 3rd battalion of the Parachute Regiment are engaged in counter-riot training exercises.

Government officials have downplayed the possibility of deploying the parachute regiment during civil unrest like last summer's urban riots, but the character of the exercises conducted at the Lydd military base in Kent tells a different story. The training consisted of how to arrest rioters in scenarios recreating last August's riots that involved fighting running battles with groups of protesters.

The Parachute regiment has been at the forefront of all the post-war colonial operations. On January 30, 1972, commanders of the Parachute regiment deployed on the streets of Northern Ireland opened fire on unarmed Irish civil rights protesters in Derry, killing 13 and wounding 17. More recently, in 2006, they have been deployed in the Helmand province of Afghanistan.

Commanding officer Major Richard Todd stated, "Many of the drills are no different to what the Roman Army used to do, with highly disciplined soldiers advancing forward under the protection of shields. The key to dealing with large, hostile crowds is control and knowing when and how to react to what is happening in front of you."

"This training is about getting soldiers used to facing a high pressure situation so they don't overreact if they have to face it for real," he said.

The *Daily Telegraph* article concluded, "Defence sources have confirmed that if violence were to return to British cities, especially during the Olympic Games, the Paras would be 'ideally placed' to provide 'short-term' support to police forces around the UK.... As well

as 3 Para, the Army has another unit known as the 'Public Order Battalion', also trained to deal with rioting, bringing the total number of troops to around 1,500."

As the economic crisis deepens and hostility to the Tory/Liberal Democrat coalition government intensifies, the ruling elite is preparing a violent crackdown against an inevitable social upheaval.

The Home Office is considering a range of repressive weapons to be deployed during civil unrest. They include water cannon, chemical irritant projectiles, increased numbers of officers trained to fire plastic bullets, aerial spy drones and a new weapon that fires a blinding light that has been developed at the Clyde-based Photonic Security Systems.

The *Daily Telegraph* reported, "The laser, resembling a rifle and known as an SMU 100, can dazzle and incapacitate targets up to 500m away with a wall of light up to three metres squared. It costs £25,000 and has an infrared scope to spot looters."

Paul Kerr, the firm's managing director, added, "The system would give police an intimidating visual deterrent. If you can't look at something you can't attack it."

The blinding device was pioneered by a Royal Marine Commando based on similar models used by troops in Afghanistan to deter insurgent attacks on military convoys. A Home Office spokesman said it will be piloted by at least one police force.

*The Sunday Times* reported other new weapons being considered. According to the Home Office, tasers and CS gas operated over a short distance, exposing an operational deficiency to be rectified by a longer-range "wireless electronic incapacitator," and the use of "chemical irritant projectiles."

A recent government report into the police handling

of the riots concluded, “The Metropolitan Police has increased the number of officers trained to deploy with baton gun teams so that teams can be deployed more flexibly if and when required.”

Last December, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that the London Metropolitan Police (the Met) has been in detailed discussions with the Association of Chief Police Officers to buy three water cannon.

The Met has announced that the number of arrests connected to last summer’s riots is approaching 4,000. According to a statement by Detective Superintendent William Lyle, there have been 3,864 arrests across London, of which 2,385 have either been charged or summonsed. So far, 1,331 have been sentenced, with 645 given “custodial sentences.”

The national picture of arrests is now well over 5,000 and growing. In England’s second city, Birmingham, total arrests stand at 770, with a further 149 images still on public display. Of these, 297 have been charged with 169 convictions. In Manchester, 390 arrests have been made, with 200 appearing in court.

Lyle explained how teams of “officers have now viewed the majority of the 250,000 hours of CCTV footage recovered, with an estimated 45,000 hours left remaining.” They were “releasing further images of those we are seeking.”

The poorest districts of London continue to be the scenes of large-scale police operations, with 5,000 officers deployed across 32 boroughs in a three-day “blitz” against gangs, leading to 500 arrests. Vans patrol the streets covered with large screens displaying images of those the police accuse of being involved in the August riots.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**