

UK government planning troops on the streets for combined pandemic “second wave” and hard Brexit crisis

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“Pandemic influenza, severe flooding, a Covid second wave and an unruly exit from the EU [European Union] transition period could cause a systemic economic crisis with major impact on disposable incomes, unemployment, business activity, international trade and market stability.”

This is how the Conservative government’s Cabinet Office outlines the potential situation this winter in the UK in a document titled “Preliminary set of Reasonable Worst-Case Scenario Planning Assumptions to support civil contingencies planning for the end of the Transition Period.”

The presentation dated July 2020 and listed as “Official sensitive” was leaked to the *Sun*, which reported it on Sunday, describing it as a “Doomsday Document.”

The *Sun* notes that the document reveals:

“One in 20 Town Halls could go bust in a second Covid wave, sparking social care chaos; The economic impact of the virus and Brexit could cause public disorder, shortages and price hikes; Troops may have to be drafted on to the streets to help the police in the worst-case scenario—1,500 are already on stand by” and “Supplies of food and fuel are all under threat this Christmas if Dover becomes blocked.”

The “reasonable worst-case scenario” it describes is one in which Britain crashes out of its transitional arrangement with the EU at the end of the year without having secured a trade deal. Following the latest week-long round of talks that concluded last Friday, EU Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier accused Britain of “wasting time,” adding that there had been “no progress whatsoever on the issues that matter” and that the negotiations were “going backwards more than forwards.”

If the UK were to end up without a trade deal, the Cabinet paper foresees “mandatory controls on UK goods from day one.” This would seriously affect both imports and exports. All trucks entering and leaving the country would require customs clearance documents and could be subject to border inspections, leading to massive delays at ports such as Dover and Calais. 2019 saw 2,397,270 haulage vehicles passing

through the Channel port, which handled up to 17 percent of the UK’s entire trade in goods worth up to an estimated £122 billion in 2017.

Delays at this sensitive choke point would impact vital food supplies, medication and the movement of parts for just-in-time manufacturing. For example, Honda UK holds just an hour’s worth of parts at its Swindon factory and relies on 350 trucks a day arriving from Europe to maintain the production lines.

Other spin-off effects would bring major shortages. Thirty percent of UK food is imported from the EU, raising the prospect of empty supermarket shelves. Delays to the arrival of medication would place many patients at serious risk, with 75 percent of medicine imports arriving via Dover and limited shelf life, meaning such vital drugs cannot be easily stockpiled.

The *Sun* says of the document’s contents, “The outlook is also bleak for Gibraltar and the Channel Islands, both reliant on imports. Gibraltar could be cut off from Spain and economically crippled and the Channel Islands may need airdrops of medicines and food.”

This already drastic situation could then become the “perfect storm,” the report’s authors warn, if a major flare-up of COVID-19 results from the reopening of the economy and particularly of schools in September, if the winter flu season proves harsher than usual, and if bad weather causes major flooding, adding to transport disruption.

Interruptions to the movement of energy supplies for power generation and transportation would increase the likelihood of blackouts at the coldest time of the year. Water purification requiring imported chemicals could also be hit, threatening rationing.

According to the document, the National Health Service (NHS) could face a “one in 40-year flu scenario alongside even a continuation of the current levels of C19 [COVID-19] and [be] significantly overwhelmed in any level of second peak.”

Even now, the ability of local authorities to provide much-needed services is under threat as 1-in-20 councils in England “are already at high risk of financial failure - following COVID-19.”

A rise in historically low inflation rates, as well as pushing up the cost of necessities such as food, heat and lighting, could “significantly impact social care providers due to increasing staff and supply costs,” the document finds.

The criminally irresponsible policies of the Johnson government make such a “reasonable worst-case scenario” more, not less, likely.

The headlong push to reopen the entire economy places the drive for profits above the threat to millions of lives. This is being compounded by the reopening of schools throughout the UK under conditions where it is virtually impossible to stop the spread of the coronavirus among children in crowded and dilapidated facilities. This is confirmed by the experiences in every country where schools have been reopened.

The latest Cabinet study follows on from previous government plans for the possible imposition of martial law in the context of the deepening crisis over Britain’s exiting the EU.

Under a so-called “Operation Yellowhammer,” Whitehall mandarins could employ sweeping powers embodied in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, introduced by the Labour government of Tony Blair. This could include curfews, travel bans, confiscation of property and the deployment of the armed forces.

Under the Act, the government can arrogate to itself extraordinary powers, enabling it to declare a state of emergency without a parliamentary vote. “Emergency regulations” that are virtually unlimited can be decreed using the Royal Prerogative. These include giving “directions or orders” prohibiting assemblies, closing down electronic communications, and outlawing “other specified activities.”

In March, the government implemented significant parts of Yellowhammer in its Emergency Coronavirus Bill. This enables the government to restrict or prohibit events and gatherings in England and Wales during the pandemic in any place, vehicle, train, vessel or aircraft, any movable structure and any offshore installation and, where necessary, to close premises. It provides a temporary power to close educational establishments or childcare providers, extended to cover Scotland and Northern Ireland, where there is no equivalent legislation.

Yellowhammer predicted a “rise in public disorder and community tensions.” As the Emergency Coronavirus Bill was passed, it was announced that 20,000 military personnel were on standby—10,000 military personnel regularly

assigned to operations among civilians, such as in floods, plus a further 10,000 troops.

The Bill was backed by all sections of the political establishment, including Labour under its then nominally “left” leader Jeremy Corbyn. Introduced to Parliament on March 19, these draconian measures passed through the House of Commons without a vote on March 23 and were made law on March 25 after receiving Royal Assent. The Emergency Coronavirus Act will remain in place for at least two years and can be updated every six months.

The Cabinet document provides further evidence that the Tories are preparing for a major eruption of class conflict. According to the *Sun*, the report wargames having to deal with “coordinated industrial action,” with troops available to assist the police in maintaining “public order.”

The Johnson government’s handling of the pandemic has been catastrophic for the population, with more than 65,000 people having needlessly lost their lives. This has generated mounting anger with health, education, transport, food processing and warehouse workers among the sections of the working class protesting their safety, lives and jobs being daily jeopardised.

Millions are, to cite the document, staring a “major impact on disposable incomes” in the face with the government already cutting back on its furlough scheme—to be ended entirely at the end of October. While the state-funded scheme only paid 80 percent of employees’ wages over the last few months, it was the mechanism through which millions of workers were able to keep their jobs.

With corporations already having shed tens of thousands of jobs so far during the pandemic, unemployment is set to rocket in the coming months with predictions that the jobless rate could almost treble to 15 percent.



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