

Home Secretary Suella Braverman seeks license to kill for UK police

Chris Marsden
26 September 2023

Writing in support of Metropolitan Police officers who had handed in their guns in protest at the announced murder trial of the killer of Chris Kaba, Home Secretary Suella Braverman insisted on X/Twitter that armed officers should not “fear ending up in the dock for carrying out their duties”.

Braverman wrote Sunday, “We depend on our brave firearms officers to protect us from the most dangerous and violent in society... They mustn’t fear ending up in the dock for carrying out their duties.”

She added, “That’s why I have launched a review to ensure they have the confidence to do their jobs while protecting us all.”

Kaba was killed by a Metropolitan Police firearms officer in London with a shot to the head on September 5, 2022. He was unarmed. Braverman’s intervention came after the officer who shot Kaba was finally formally charged with murder by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) on Thursday. He has only been identified as NX121, after being granted anonymity.

Braverman was widely accused of contempt of court and potentially endangering the outcome of the murder trial by flouting restrictions on comments about ongoing legal proceedings. Writing in the *Independent*, Nazir Afzal OBE, the former chief crown prosecutor, stated, “Every lawyer I’ve spoken to thinks Suella Braverman has overstepped the mark ... At the time of writing she hasn’t even deleted it. What does that mean for the integrity of our judicial process? What does that mean for justice itself?”

The Conservative Party government immediately supported Braverman, with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak backing her proposed review during a visit to a community centre in Hertfordshire, telling broadcasters, “Our firearms officers do an incredibly difficult job. They are making life-or-death decisions in a split second to keep us safe and they deserve our gratitude for their bravery.”

His official spokesman said the Home Office review was expected to be finalised by the end of the year.

Criticism of Braverman for prejudicing a future trial barely scratches the surface of what is represented by her intervention. The aim of her proposed review is to provide armed police with de facto immunity from future prosecutions—effectively a license to kill.

Braverman’s post cited *Telegraph* report in the of between 100 and 300 armed Metropolitan Police officers handing in their guns in protest against the charging of NX121. If the figure of 300 is accurate this represents a tenth of the Met’s 3,000 armed officers.

Their action was backed by the Met, as well as the government. A spokesman for the force said, “We are in ongoing discussions with those officers to support them and to fully understand the genuinely held concerns that they have.”

Met Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley sent an open letter to Braverman calling for reform of the way police officers are held to account, particularly when they use force. Welcoming the announcement of a review, he demanded raising the threshold for an Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) or Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) investigation, and changing the test used for self-defence.

Maximising the atmosphere of crisis surrounding the police protest, the Met requested and the Home Office sent an appeal to the Ministry of Defence Sunday to “provide routine counter-terrorism contingency support to the Metropolitan Police, should it be needed”.

On Monday, the MoD agreed soldiers could fill the roles of firearms officers, with reports that the Met had specifically asked for elite SAS officers to take on anti-terror responsibilities. However, on Monday afternoon, Scotland Yard said that enough officers had returned to armed duty for the force to be able to meet its counter-terrorism responsibilities without military help.

Encouraged by the government’s stance, “Firearms officers in the Metropolitan Police are planning a mass downing of guns if the identity of the officer accused of Chris Kaba’s murder is made public by a judge”, reported Sky News on Tuesday evening. It noted, “The Met officer is known only as NX121 after a district judge granted an interim anonymity order. But the order could be lifted at a hearing at the Old Bailey on 4 October, which would lead to the officer being named publicly.” Sky News cited a “serving firearms officer” who said, “The anonymity hearing will determine what happens. If he loses his anonymity, then serious questions will be asked. I haven’t handed my firearm in yet, but I would if that happens—and there are many others that would do the same.”

Leading legal and civil rights organisations pointed to the dangerous implications of the proposed Home Office review. Deborah Coles, the executive director of INQUEST, an independent charity working with families bereaved by state-related deaths, said, “The suggestion that there is something in the law or legal process that is biased against serving police officers does not bear scrutiny. Police firearms officers must remain accountable to the rule of law.”

Solicitor Harriet Wistrich, who represented the family of Jean Charles De Menezes—killed in hail of bullets at Stockwell Tube station in 2005 by police who mistook him for a terror suspect—told BBC Radio’s *Today*, “No one is above the law and neither should these officers be above the law... Many people have lost their lives at the hands of police and there is virtually never a prosecution.”

The reality is that the police are already virtually unaccountable for killings. According to INQUEST, 80 people have died as a result of police shootings since 1990. There have been 1,871 deaths in or following police custody or contact over the same period. But there has only been one successful prosecution of an officer for manslaughter, in the case of former footballer Dalian Atkinson, and no successful prosecution of any officer for murder. Ten murder/manslaughter charges following deaths have been brought without a successful prosecution.

The glorification of the Met’s armed officers as heroes by the government and the media is grotesque. They are members of easily the UK’s most corrupt and discredited police force, filled with criminals and psychopaths.

This month the Met reported that more than 1,000 of its officers are currently suspended or on restricted duties, as the result of a crackdown necessitated by widespread outrage following the convictions of former officers David Carrick, a serial rapist, and murderer Wayne Couzens. Couzens was given a whole-life sentence for the murder of Sarah Everard in 2021, while Carrick was handed 30 years this year for attacks carried out against a dozen women over two decades.

Following Carrick’s conviction, reviews were conducted of some 1,600 cases from the last decade in which officers faced allegations of domestic or sexual violence but no action was taken. Investigations into 450 cases are ongoing. Carrick and Couzens both worked in the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command, where only one in three staff under investigation have been cleared of wrongdoing.

The Met’s Deputy Assistant Commissioner Stuart Cundy said the number of affected officers was almost the size of a small police force, with one in 34 suspended or restricted for cases sometimes described as “abhorrent”. He warned that removing all corrupt officers could take years, even with plans to hold around 30 misconduct hearings and 30 gross incompetence hearings each month.

Former Met Commissioner Cressida Dick, who came to prominence as leader of the operation that led to the

assassination of Jean Charles de Menezes, was forced to resign in February 2022. A review of the Met by Baroness Louise Casey of Blackstock in March found that the organisation was institutionally racist, sexist and homophobic, warning that it could even be broken up if changes were not made speedily.

Labour Mayor of London Sadiq Khan was drafted in to manage the fallout, setting up a London Policing Board to “oversee and scrutinise” the review while insisting, “Sir Mark himself has had the humility and candour to say, look, he needs around two or three years to turn things around. I think he’s right, by the way.”

More is at stake than rehabilitating a crisis-ridden police force.

Sunak and Braverman are leading a campaign to shift the government sharply to the right, especially on law and order and immigration. In part this has an electoral dimension, aimed at shoring up the party’s support in the upper middle class against a Labour Party led by Starmer that has adopted its right-wing economic and social agenda wholesale.

More fundamentally, however, the Tories are strengthening the repressive apparatus of the state in preparation for explosive class struggles.

Requests to the armed forces like that made by the Met were used last year to mobilise soldiers in strikebreaking operations against border staff and paramedics during a strike wave involving millions of workers.

The more widespread use of state repression was not needed because the trade union bureaucracy successfully policed and betrayed numerous strikes. However, this has gravely undermined the unions’ standing among workers, threatening the eruption of a more consciously insurgent moment of workers battered by a cost of living crisis at a time when ever greater sacrifices are being demanded so that British imperialism can take full part in the ongoing NATO-led war against Russia in Ukraine—and stake its place in US-led plans to confront China.

Allowing the police to kill with impunity is of a piece with a battery of anti-democratic legislation directed against the working class—including the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act criminalising industrial action in essential services and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and Public Order Act 2023 severely curtailing the right to protest.

Whichever party eventually forms the government following next year’s general election, workers must understand that they face a head-on collision with the capitalist class and its state apparatus for which they must prepare.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)