

UK government plans harder clampdown on protests against Israeli war crimes in Gaza

Thomas Scripps
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The British state is planning to step up its repression of protests against Israel's war crimes and ethnic cleansing in Gaza. As the popular movement in solidarity with the Palestinians grows—half a million attended a national demonstration in London on Saturday—the government and police are seeking new tools to intimidate and arrest protestors.

In the lead-up to Saturday's demonstration, the media whipped up a torrent of slander denouncing those participating. There have been countless references to a fascistic article by the UK's Commissioner for Countering Extremism Robin Simcox, published in *The Times*, "Hate marches in Britain are a wake-up call to all decent people."

The hundreds of thousands who have protested Israel's war on Gaza with chants of "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," declares Simcox, are guilty of chanting "death to Jews". They have "been careful to construe their public displays of support just below the legal threshold for hate crime, glorification of terror, or public order offences... exploiting one of our proudest British values, freedom of expression, to pursue a shameful extremist agenda, the normalisation and promotion of antisemitism."

His screed continues that this is also "the price that Britain and other Western European countries are paying for a three decade-long failed policy mix of mass migration and multiculturalism."

On Friday, *The Times* added to this barrage the totally baseless allegations, supposedly citing private conversations with counterterrorism officers, that the Iranian government "is trying to heighten tensions at rallies over Israel's bombing of Gaza. They have warned of increased hostile-state activity in Britain. It is directly linked to the Iranian regime and includes a campaign of online disinformation and Iranian

operatives being physically present at protests."

On Sunday, head of London's Metropolitan Police Mark Rowley used these lies as a platform to call for a review of the legal definition of "extremism", giving his officers a free hand to round up as many protestors as they can get their hands on.

Roughly 100 people have been arrested in connection with the protests since Israel's war began, but Rowley threatened there would be "many more" in the future: "we're going to be absolutely ruthless". Crown Prosecution Service lawyers are now stationed in police operations rooms monitoring the protests to "identify" as many alleged offences as possible.

The London police chief, previously the UK's lead counter terror officer, did his bit to smear the hundreds of thousands who have taken a stand against Israel's genocide as Iranian stooges, terrorist accomplices and antisemites: "You've got state threats from Iran, you've got terrorism being accelerated by the events and hate crime in communities... In the middle of it, we've got these big protests."

He lamented that police could only "enforce up to the line of the law," since "there's no point arresting hundreds of people if it's not prosecutable."

He added, "There is scope to be much sharper in how we deal with extremism within this country. The law was never designed to deal with extremism, there's a lot to do with terrorism and hate crime but we don't have a body of law that deals with extremism, and that is creating a gap."

The next step in this state orchestrated witch-hunt was for Home Secretary Suella Braverman to order a Home Office review of terrorism and extremism laws to consider "tweaks to the wording of existing laws to strengthen policing of the language and slogans at pro-Palestinian demos," according to *Politico*.

Given the timescale of a review and new legislation, Communities Secretary Michael Gove has meanwhile been tasked with implementing a new non-statutory definition of extremism by the end of the year. *The Times* reports that the new wording “will make it easier to crack down on charities, places of worship, universities and other organisations that spread radical ideology or host hate preachers.”

The current definition is already as broad as “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values”.

On Monday, Braverman, other senior ministers, national security officials and police took part in a COBRA meeting (which deal with national crises) “to look at domestic security arrangements in the wake of three weekends of protests and rising incidents of anti-Semitism,” in the *Times*’ words.

Speaking to broadcasters after the meeting, Braverman let rip a barrage of lies and threats, “Let me explain what we have seen over the last few weekends. We have seen now tens of thousands of people take to the streets following the massacre of Jewish people, the single largest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust, chanting for the erasure of Israel from the map.

“To my mind there is only one way to describe those marches. They are hate marches.”

Braverman, who is the most notorious hate monger in Britain today, continued, “What the police have made clear is that they are concerned that there is a large number of bad actors who are deliberately operating beneath the criminal threshold in a way which you or I or the vast majority of British people would consider to be utterly odious.” She added that she “would not hesitate” to change the law to facilitate a crackdown.

The ruling class is intent on the brutal repression of a mass movement they have long feared, amid a resurgence of the class struggle now exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and the outbreak of war--first in Ukraine and now in the Middle East. It is using the McCarthyite atmosphere whipped up by the media and the government over any opposition to Israel’s genocidal assault on the Palestinians to roll out well-prepared plans for a police state.

Rowley was appointed to head the Metropolitan Police for precisely this purpose, having spent the previous few years advising the UK government’s Commission on Countering Extremism. In 2019, the

World Socialist Web Site reported how a report on “left-wing extremism” submitted to the Commission, “set out to brand as suspect views held by millions of people” as extremist, among them that “The greatest threat to democracy has always come from the far right” and that “Zionism is a form of racism”.

The eruption of a mass, global movement against the imperialist powers and their Israeli client state is exposing the real state of political relations the world over: deeply isolated and despised governments stand opposed to the vast bulk of the working class and youth.

As their last shreds of legitimacy fall away, the governing parties and their nominal parliamentary opponents are turning to dictatorship to preserve their rule. Workers and young people taking a stand in defence of the Palestinians against Israel’s crimes are compelled to wage a political fight against their own complicit and authoritarian states.



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