

UK government demands Saturday's national Gaza protest rally in London be banned

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The British state is seeking to ban this Saturday's national demonstration against Israel's criminal war on Gaza—the fourth national event in five weeks of continuous protest around the UK.

Half a million people turned out in London in defence of the Palestinians on October 28, the largest anti-war demonstration since the protest against the Iraq War in 2003.

Backing Israel to the hilt, the Conservative government and the media have responded with a torrent of lies downplaying the size of the rallies and accusing participants of violence, hate speech, anti-Semitism and support for terrorism.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Home Secretary Suella Braverman have repeatedly denounced the protests in fascist terms and called for this Saturday's demonstration to be banned, using its coincidence with Armistice Day and the following day's Remembrance Sunday as justification.

Sunak wrote a public letter to Metropolitan Police Chief Sir Mark Rowley last Friday, saying he was “deeply concerned that a number of protests are currently planned to disrupt those acts of Remembrance next weekend.”

The prime minister had previously tweeted, “To plan protests on Armistice Day is provocative and disrespectful, and there is a clear and present risk that the Cenotaph and other war memorials could be desecrated, something that would be an affront to the British public and the values we stand for.”

Braverman has launched one vicious attack on demonstrators after another. She frothed last Friday, “It is entirely unacceptable to desecrate Armistice Day with a hate march through London. If it goes ahead there is an obvious risk of serious public disorder, violence and damage as well as giving offence to millions of decent British people.”

The police do not have the power to unilaterally ban

protests but can request that action from the home secretary. On Monday, the Met took a step towards doing so, releasing a statement declaring, “Senior officers are concerned at criminal acts by breakaway groups intent on fuelling disorder who are attracted by these regular events.”

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Ade Adelekan claimed, “The risk of violence and disorder linked to breakaway groups is growing... Our message to the organisers is clear: Please, we ask you to urgently reconsider. It is not appropriate to hold any protests in London this weekend.”

Braverman welcomed the statement, adding, “The hate marchers need to understand that decent British people have had enough of these displays of thuggish intimidation and extremism.”

Organisers the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Friends of Al-Aqsa, Stop the War Coalition, Muslim Association of Britain, Palestinian Forum in Britain and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament have refused to postpone the demonstration.

Across two joint statements, they point out that the planned route of the march is from Marble Arch in Hyde Park to the US embassy south of the river, “well away from the centre of London and Whitehall” where the Cenotaph is located and is scheduled to begin “nearly 2 hours after the minute silence of commemoration for the war dead.”

They add that the government's statements “are encouraging the calls from far-rights activists and commentators who appear to be inciting action on the streets to stop the protests taking place” and “are motivated by a desire to suppress widespread public support for an end to Israel's bombardment of the people of Gaza.”

Following the COBRA meeting Rowley issued a statement that there was currently insufficient intelligence of a risk of serious public disorder to justify banning

Saturday's demonstration. Referencing section 13 of the 1986 Public Order Act, Rowley said, "Many have called for us to use this power to ban a planned march by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign on Saturday."

"But the use of this power is incredibly rare and must be based on intelligence which suggests there will be a real threat of serious disorder and no other way for police to manage the event ..."

Any hesitation from the Met in giving Braverman her green light to ban the demonstration outright reflects nervousness at the implications. The force is being asked to suppress the most popular protest movement in years—engaging in clashes with the many thousands who will inevitably defy a ban.

The fact that the voice of caution in the British state is former counter terror chief Rowley is an indication of how rapidly the ruling class is moving to the right, and secondly, that the banning of protests is only a matter of time.

On Tuesday afternoon, the government piled on the pressure, calling a COBRA emergency meeting in Downing Street, reportedly to discuss the "UK's terror threat level", the "impact of [the Israel-Gaza] war on the UK" and the "threat from domestic terrorism". A No. 10 spokesperson said the session would be "particularly focused on the impact of the terrorist attack on the UK domestically and how we can address some of the importance around community cohesion".

The *Sun* wrote, "Ministers are concerned violence could erupt at Saturday's pro-Palestine protest". According to the *Evening Standard*, a COBRA meeting last Monday "consider[ed] intelligence that Iranian agents may be creating unrest in Britain by stoking pro-Palestinian protests."

Whether the decision is made to formally ban the demonstration or not, conditions are being created for a crackdown. Since the protests began a month ago, the police have been steadily ramping up their response. Last Saturday, 1,300 police officers were mobilised for a protest of roughly 50,000 limited to London's Trafalgar Square, with 29 arrested—only six of them later charged—taking the total for protests nationally to 160.

Much more is being demanded, with a statement of intent given by the arrest of over 100 Just Stop Oil protestors in a single day in Whitehall on Monday amid flat out lies from Tory head office that demonstrators had glued themselves to the Cenotaph.

The organisers of the demonstration are correct in stating that a lead is being given to far-right forces to

attack the demonstrations that would provide the provocation necessary for a ban or for an attack by police on any march. Fascist criminal Tommy Robinson, real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, wrote on X/Twitter, "Saturday 11/11/11 London, your country needs you" and posted a video calling on "a mass of men who are willing to stand for their country".

On Tuesday evening the *Daily Mail* reported, "Football hooligans are planning to 'team up' and 'protect' the Cenotaph from pro-Palestine protestors... with police fearing more than a thousand will come to London". The authors write, "One group, named 'Football Lads Against Extremism', claims veterans have reached out and asked for their support 'due to the threat from the far left and pro-Palestine supporters to disrupt the Remembrance Day parade'."

Fascists, including open Hitler worshippers, are allowed to march past the Cenotaph every Remembrance Sunday, proof of how a commemoration of the war dead is cynically co-opted as a celebration of British militarism. In contrast a demonstration calling for a ceasefire on Armistice Day, marking the day World War I ended, is denounced by the warmongers supporting the mass murder of Palestinians.

The Labour Party has helped to whip up these forces and will back whatever the Met and Braverman decide to do. Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey, Shadow Security Minister Dan Jarvis and Shadow Leader of the House of Commons Lucy Powell used interviews last week to raise the non-existent spectre of the march disrupting Remembrance events around the Cenotaph.

Healey told *Sky News* last week of a ban on the protest, "If the police decided they didn't want to go ahead... it will be for the home secretary to take that decision," adding "I hope that won't be necessary."

The working class, students and young people must organise to defeat these dictatorial moves, building as big a protest as possible on Saturday and expanding the fight to their workplaces. Mass protests are only the first step of a struggle to stop Israel's war crimes and ethnic cleansing, which must encompass strikes against arms production and shipment facilities and ultimately a political general strike against all complicit governments.



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