

UK Prime Minister Starmer launches police “standing army” following far-right riots

Robert Stevens
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Following six days of riots throughout Britain led by fascists, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer held an emergency COBRA meeting on Monday, a month to the day since his Labour Party took office on July 5.

Named “COBRA” after the Cabinet Office Briefing Room A in Downing Street, the committee gathers in times of national crisis. The meeting was attended by Starmer, Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, other ministers, Attorney General Lord Richard Hermer, police leaders and representatives from the National Crime Agency and prison service.

With a Union Jack behind him, Starmer announced a new “standing army of specialist officers” to quell the riots. Members of Parliament have called for a recall of parliament, and the use of the Army to deal with the rioters, which Starmer has so far opposed.

The “standing police army” is the creation of a national police force. It follows Starmer’s statement on August 1 after meeting with police leaders that he would “establish a national capability, across police forces, to tackle violent disorder”.

Starmer’s promises make clear that the new force will be used not just against the far-right but all opposition to the government.

The fascists seized on the stabbing murder of three children on July 29 in Southport, England, to launch a riot falsely blaming a Muslim for the deaths. Attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers—and anyone not white—in many towns and cities have become ever more violent.

Starmer said, “We will have a standing army of specialist public duty officers so that we will have enough officers to deal with this where we need them,” adding, “we will ramp up criminal justice. There have already been hundreds of arrests, some have appeared in court this morning.”

Speaking to *Sky News*, Home Secretary Cooper said,

“We’ve made sure there are additional prosecutors in place, that there are prisons, that prison places are ready, and also that the courts stand ready as well.”

The reality is that to date far-right thugs have mostly been treated with kid gloves, as they rampage through cities, attack mosques, loot stores and carry out arson. It is purely down to chance and the brave response of local communities that no-one has yet died in the pogrom-type attacks.

After five days of riots, just 273 rioters had been arrested by Sunday. Another 147 were arrested on Sunday, taking the total by Monday morning to 420. This is despite the police having massive powers at their disposal—across numerous acts of parliaments—to disperse protests, make arrests and even make arrests before disturbances take place.

On Sunday, the fascists targeted two hotels—in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, and Tamworth, Staffordshire—containing asylum seekers, attacks that were planned days in advance.

In Rotherham, where the fascists set fire to part of the building, the *Times* reported that “men clad in balaclavas pushed through the shattered glass window of the dining room at the Holiday Inn Express... and marauded through the corridors where 130 terrified migrants live.”

Once inside the fascists began attacking asylum seekers, with one explaining, “They came into this floor [first] and hit me until the police drove them away down the corridor.”

Before the fascists arrived, a group of around 100 mobilised to protect the hotel, with only a small number of police present. Speaking to Sky News, Nick Aldworth, the Director of Counter Terrorism and Risk at the Carlisle Support Services’ firm, revealed, “I have an intelligence document dated two days ago that highlighted an extreme right-wing protest at this location [Holiday Inn, Rotherham] at 12pm today.

“With two days’ preparation time, I wouldn’t expect protesters to be able to get to the venue like this. I would suggest there’s been a really serious failure by the planners and senior leadership team in South Yorkshire Police.”

South Yorkshire Police (SYP) are no strangers to mass mobilisations when it suits theirs, and the governments’ purposes in taking on the working class. SYP mobilised—along with 18 other police forces—6,000 officers to violently attack and mass arrest picketing miners at the Orgreave coking works during the 1984-85 miners’ strike.

In pledging a crackdown on the far-right thugs, the Starmer government has unleashed a torrent of hypocrisy, claiming that the riots have as good as fallen from the sky. The fact is that the fascists are operating in a political environment polluted by the anti-immigrant sentiment spewed out by the main parties of the ruling class, Labour and Conservative, for years, echoed by a foul xenophobic right-wing media.

The demand of the fascists that asylum seekers must be driven out of hotels is a call stretching back years, after first being made by the fascist groups and by Nigel Farage, now the leader of the Reform UK party.

In 2020, Farage, then leader of the Brexit Party, fronted a series of YouTube videos on opposing “illegal” immigration under the title, “Nigel Farage investigates.” In one, Farage went to the Rivenhall hotel in the Essex constituency of Whitham, used to accommodate asylum seekers and refugees.

Shortly after members of the fascist Britain First entered hotels in London, Essex, Birmingham and Warrington in which asylum seekers were being housed, and harassed them. Similar provocations were organised by another fascist outfit, For Britain.

Ever since Farage emerged as a leader of his UK Independence Party in 1993, his role has been to shift government policy sharply to the right. Everything Farage demands today becomes the policy of the main parties soon after.

Labour pledged during the general election campaign to “clear the asylum backlog” and “secure the borders”, announcing as soon as they came to office that they were planning to end the temporary accommodation of asylum seekers in hotels.

Then Shadow Home Secretary Cooper made an inflammatory X posting on June 13, declaring that 8,000 asylum seekers were unaccounted for in Conservative government figures: “How can they just lose 8,000

people? Who they are paying for. In Home Office asylum hotels. Labour will clear the backlog, end asylum hotels & fix the Tories chaos.”

On July 2, two days before the general election, Cooper visited Tamworth at the invitation of prospective Labour MP Sarah Edwards. In a Facebook posting Edwards said, “Labour will restore community policing, control our borders, and close the asylum hotel.”

This was the very hotel attacked by the fascists just over one month later. Cooper said in a video with Edwards that Labour would be “fixing the chaos in the asylum system, ending asylum hotels” and “actually get some grip again”.

On July 30, as the fascist riots began in Southport, Edwards made a speech in parliament declaring, “In Tamworth the Holiday Inn has been used for asylum purposes for years and the simple reality is that residents want their hotel back.”

Local Rotherham Labour MP John Healey—now the defence secretary—wrote to then immigration minister Robert Jenrick last October, stating that the Holiday Inn, attacked in Rotherham on Sunday, should not be used as an “asylum hotel”.

Responding to the spread of the riots on Sunday, Farage said, “In the short term, we will quell the riots, but deeper longer-term problems remain.” He demanded an “honest debate” as “The majority of our population can see the fracturing of our communities as a result of mass, uncontrolled immigration, whether legal or illegal.”

The *Sun* newspaper, which endorsed Labour in the election, echoed Farage, editorialising Monday that while the courts had to “throw the book” at “far-right thugs” (whose propaganda it has spewed out for years) the government had to deal with “the twin problems of violent crime and illegal migration.” It added, “Punishment, too, should be meted out to the hard-Left and Islamists also seeking to drive a wedge in our communities.”

The editorial can be read as the Labour government’s playbook in the coming weeks.



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