

London police arrest 40 following Gaza protest outside Downing Street

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The repression of the anti-Gaza genocide protests was stepped up Tuesday evening with London's Metropolitan Police arresting 40 people. They were arrested following a demonstration by around 10,000 people outside Downing Street, the home of the prime minister.

The draconian legislation used to clamp down on the protest included provisions in the Public Order Act and a Section 35 Dispersal Order under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

The “Hands off Rafah, End the genocide Emergency Rally” was called by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Stop the War Coalition and other groups in response to Sunday's airstrike by the Israel Defence Forces on a tent encampment in Rafah that left at least 45 people dead. The groups have organised the many peaceful protests held in the capital since Israel's onslaught against the Palestinians began last October.

With the demonstration beginning at 6pm, the police imposed conditions under the Public Order Act—while the event was underway—requiring it to end just two hours later at 8pm and for everyone to leave the area.

The Met acknowledged in a self-serving statement that the vast majority of people left by the allotted time, but claimed “around 500 remained in Whitehall” [the main road which contains government ministries and Downing Street] and “continued to protest putting them in breach of the conditions in place”.

It claimed that “Officers engaged extensively before making a number of arrests for failing to comply with conditions. As they moved in, some in the crowd resisted physically, requiring officers to use force to extract those who had been arrested.”

“The protesters then set off on a breakaway march, making their way as far as nearby Bridge Street, outside Westminster tube station, where cordons were put in place to detain them.”

The Met also claimed, “Further opportunities were given to allow the group to comply with conditions. They were also informed that they were causing an obstruction of the

highway”.

Shortly before 22:00hrs, officers wearing riot gear began a series of arrests, going into the crowd and snatching those suspected of leading the breakaway protest. Those detained were arrested for “offences including breach Public Order Act conditions, obstruction of the highway and assaults on emergency workers.”

The statement noted of others, without giving a figure of the number involved, “their details were taken and they were informed that they remain under investigation in relation to the events on Tuesday evening... Those who refused to provide their details were also arrested.”

Disproving this sanitised account, video evidence shows that the police had been readied for attacking the demonstrators and making arrests, with what were later described by Westminster Police as “specialist arrest teams”. Many involved in the operation wore riot gear, with even officers in everyday uniform threatening protesters with batons drawn.

To portray the seat of government as being overrun by protesters and justify mass arrests, the police exaggerated the numbers involved. Rather than 500 protesters remaining in the area, overhead photos and video clips show that less than 300 were present.

Many will not have known they had to leave the area at 8pm, as this was only stipulated at 7:17 PM—according to a post on X by the Westminster Police account—subsequently reposted by the Met Police X account.

The Westminster Police post read, “The turnout has significantly exceeded the estimates of the organisers. To ensure the safety of everyone taking part we have closed Whitehall to traffic.

“We have put in a new condition requiring the protest to end at 8pm and we'll reopen the road as soon as possible after that.”

At 11:49pm police issued a tweet stating, “A Section 35 Dispersal Order is now in place across Westminster.”

The police clampdown was met with screaming headlines in the right-wing press and demands for further repression.

The Daily Mail wrote, “Violent pro-Palestine mobs have clashed with police outside Downing Street as shocking footage shows Met Police officers donning riot gear attempting to gain control over the chaos.” The police had to take action, according to the *Mail*, because they were confronted by “masses of chanting crowds blocking roads and running riot in the streets.”

The Sun denounced “Protest chaos,” in which “some of the crowd resisted arrest which required officers to use force to remove those who had been arrested before the protest broke away.”

Senior News Reporter at the *Express* Ciran McGrath wrote in that paper’s article of a social media posting, “Out of control pro-Palestine protesters goad police in shocking central London clip”.

But the *Mail* also reposted footage of protesters being violently pushed and struck by a police officer. Addressing the Met, the original poster wrote, “Hi Met—not sure if it’s very professional officers tussling with members of the public at a peaceful protest. My elderly aunt got punched on the arm [by] a psychotic angry officer.”

The arrests came just three days after police moved in to clear out and arrest protesters who were occupying an administrative building at Oxford University. The occupation was an extension of an ongoing student encampment.

The same day a small group of Zionists, in an act of provocation allowed by the police, were able to block a major road and temporarily halt a march of hundreds of pro-Palestinians in Manchester.

Since the outset of the mass protests in London, which have collectively mobilised over 4 million people in 13 demonstrations against Israel’s genocide, right-wing and fascist forces have insisted that more repression must be meted out, with police ludicrously accused of pro-Palestinian bias.

Among the tweets included in the *Mail* article was one by the far-right Turning Point group, which described one scene as: “Palestine supporters swarm the streets around Parliament and begin banging on vehicles. Met Police seem to have disappeared...”

Animating these concerns is the fact that the London protests are part of a growing global movement against the slaughter of the Palestinians. The *Mail’s* headline demonising the London protests referred to the events in the context of “a night that has seen chaos in France and Italy”.

It wrote with alarm:

On Tuesday, huge demonstrations were also seen across France, Italy and Poland, as activists marched

to voice their support for war-torn Palestine.

Yesterday evening, Paris, and Bologna saw demonstrators blocking roads and clambering up historic monuments as activists branded Israel ‘assassins’ after Sunday’s deadly airstrike.

Thousands of French people stormed though cities including Paris, Lille, Lyon, and Strasbourg to show their solidarity.

Footage captured in France showed demonstrators brandishing the red, white, black, and green flags while donning keffiyehs and chanting “We do not kill a child, whether Jewish or Palestinian: Stop bombings, free Palestine” and “Rafah, Gaza we are with you”.

In Paris, thousands of people gathered at Place de la République to display their unwavering support.

On Saturday, in a major provocation against the anti-genocide protesters, the fascist Tommy Robinson, real name Stephen Christopher Yaxley, the former leader of the English Defence League and a convicted criminal, is to hold a demonstration in London, “Stand Up Against Two Tier Policing”.

Claiming to be victims of unfair policing, the protest will march through central London, ending up in Parliament Square.

On Wednesday, three days ahead of the march, Robinson posted a thread in which the following words were emblazoned on a Palestinian flag: “F**k Palestine, F**k Hamas, F**k Islam. Want to protest? F**k off to a Muslim country and protest”.

The Robinson march is taking place at the same time as anti-genocide protests in the capital, as well as a march by the Stand Up to Racism group under the banner, “Unite against Tommy Robinson.”



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