# Calls grow for supermax prison to tackle violent attacks on UK staff



In recent weeks, a series of violent incidents within Britain's prison system has sparked renewed calls for radical reforms. Shadow Justice Secretary Robert Jenrick has questioned the prioritisation of prisoner rights over officer safety following a particularly alarming attack by Southport child killer Axel Rudakubana at HMP Belmarsh, where he assaulted a guard with boiling water. This incident came on the heels of another attack at HMP Frankland, where Manchester Arena terrorist Hashem Abedi stabbed three guards and doused them with hot cooking oil, causing life-threatening injuries. Such events underscore the growing plight of prison staff along with the dangers inherent in the current system.

Government statistics reveal a staggering rise in assaults against prison staff, with over 10,000 recorded last year, up from just 3,640 a decade ago. Moreover, serious assaults have spiked markedly, now averaging almost one per hour, with nearly 8,000 reported incidents in the year leading to June 2023 alone. In some facilities, staff have been left feeling vulnerable amidst rising overcrowding and understaffing – conditions that contribute significantly to the escalating violence.

In response to these distressing statistics, Mark Fairhurst, chairman of the Prison Officers’ Association, has advocated for the establishment of a US-style "supermax" prison to contain the nation’s most dangerous offenders. Such a facility would follow the example of ADX Florence in Colorado, often referred to as the "Alcatraz of the Rockies," known for its severe conditions designed to break the will of its inmates. Robert Hood, a former warden of ADX Florence, described the prison as "a clean version of Hell," and former prisoner Garrett Linderman recounted how the environment can lead to a profound breakdown of the human spirit.

Should Britain proceed with the construction of a supermax facility, the choice of location would be critical. Potential sites are being discussed, including the East Riding area, which is conveniently situated near existing prisons and has the infrastructure to support a high-security development. However, public apprehension regarding such high-risk criminals residing nearby is likely to be a significant obstacle.

A supermax facility would require specific architectural features aimed at isolating inmates and minimising contact with both fellow prisoners and staff. The design would likely incorporate fortified walls and advanced surveillance systems, replacing traditional guard towers with high-tech AI cameras capable of monitoring and responding to any disturbances. Inmates would face strict confinement in solitary cells for up to 23 hours a day, exacerbating any potential ramifications on mental health—a concern echoed by experts in prison design. Professor Yvonne Jewkes has cautioned against supermax conditions, describing them as “brutal, inhumane places” likely to exacerbate mental health issues.

Life inside such a facility would be austere. Cells would be minimalistic and harsh, utilising concrete beds with restrained fixtures to prevent self-harm. Inmates would have limited access to showers and basic hygiene, with meals delivered through secure feeding slots rather than by staff. The overarching goal of such a structure would be to maintain control over inmates who have displayed violent tendencies, although the success of this approach is hotly debated.

Despite public outcry for stronger measures in response to violent crimes, the implementation of supermax prisons raises ethical questions. Critics point to existing studies documenting the psychological toll imposed by such confinement, with reports of severe mental health deterioration leading to tragic outcomes, including self-harm and suicidal behaviour.

The interest in a supermax facility reflects a broader societal frustration with rising criminality and recidivism rates. Yet, as society wrestles with the complexities of punishment versus rehabilitation, fundamental questions arise: at what point does an effort to ensure safety tip into inhumane treatment? And, if prisoners are effectively dehumanised, what risks does this pose for societal values at large?

Ultimately, while the concept of a supermax prison may appeal to those concerned about safety and justice, it invites scrutiny from human rights advocates and mental health professionals alike. Should Britain determine to proceed with such a facility, it must do so with caution, balancing the imperative for security against the moral and ethical considerations that underpin a just society.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 6, 8
2. Paragraph 4
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 7
5. Paragraph 6
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraph 9

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-14720765/two-infamous-inmates-savagely-attacked-guards-britain-supermax-prison.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to-september-2024/safety-in-custody-statistics-england-and-wales-deaths-in-prison-custody-to-december-2024-assaults-and-self-harm-to-september-2024> - This UK government report provides statistics on safety in custody up to September 2024, including data on assaults and self-harm incidents in prisons. It highlights a significant increase in assaults on staff, with 120 assaults per 1,000 prisoners, marking a 19% rise from the previous year. The report also details the rise in serious assaults, both prisoner-on-prisoner and assaults on staff, emphasizing the escalating violence within the prison system.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/jan/01/assaults-on-prison-staff-nearly-hourly-in-england-and-wales-data-shows> - An article from The Guardian reports that in the year leading up to June 2023, there were nearly 8,000 assaults on prison staff in England and Wales, averaging almost one per hour. This represents a 6% increase from the previous year. The piece discusses the implications of overcrowding and understaffing in prisons, citing specific examples like HMP Wakefield, which recorded 61 assaults on staff in the first half of 2023.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to-december-2023/safety-in-custody-statistics-england-and-wales-deaths-in-prison-custody-to-march-2024-assaults-and-self-harm-to-december-2023> - This UK government publication presents safety in custody statistics up to December 2023. It reports a 25% increase in serious assault incidents, totaling 3,025 cases, with serious assaults on staff rising by 20% to 852. The report underscores the escalating violence within prisons and the challenges faced by staff in maintaining safety.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/dec/28/assaults-rise-prisons-england-and-wales> - The Guardian article highlights a significant rise in assaults within prisons in England and Wales, averaging 74 incidents daily in 2024. Of the 26,912 assaults recorded, approximately 3,200 were deemed serious. The piece discusses the impact of overcrowding and staff shortages, citing HMP Wandsworth as a notable example with 1,044 assaults, over half of which were on staff.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to December-2022/safety-in-custody-statistics-england-and-wales-deaths-in-prison-custody-to-march-2023-assaults-and-self-harm-to-december-2022> - This UK government report provides safety in custody statistics up to December 2022. It details a 19% increase in serious assault incidents, totaling 2,417 cases, with serious assaults on staff rising by 2% to 709. The report offers insights into the trends of violence within the prison system over the specified period.
7. <https://news.sky.com/story/i-thought-i-was-going-to-die-the-epidemic-of-violence-against-prison-officers-13067151> - Sky News reports on the rising violence against prison officers in England and Wales, with 8,516 assaults recorded over the 12 months to September 2023, a 16% increase from the previous year. The article includes personal accounts from officers and discusses the broader implications of overcrowding and understaffing in the prison system.