# Conservative plan to arm prison officers sparks debate over Islamist gang control and systemic chaos



The Conservative Party's recent proposal to arm certain prison officers has ignited a critical debate over the escalating chaos within the UK correctional system. Shadow Justice Secretary Robert Jenrick's argument—that increased arming is necessary in the face of “out of control” Islamist gangs and violent inmates—underscores a troubling trend that indicates not just a failing penal system but a broader national security crisis.

Jenrick emphasizes the alarming power that extremist elements wield over prison staff, stating in The Telegraph, “If prison governors can’t easily keep terrorist influencers and radicalising inmates apart from the mainstream prisoners they target, then we don’t control our prisons – they do.” This sentiment resonates deeply, especially following recent violent confrontations, such as those involving Hashem Abedi, who attacked staff with boiling oil, revealing a prison environment that seems to capitulate to chaos.

The rising dominance of Islamist gangs within prison wings, as indicated by independent reports, paints a grim picture of a facility where even prison imams struggle to exert control. These groups appoint their own 'emirs,' creating a culture where even guards hesitate to challenge their authority. This fearful dynamic perpetuates an atmosphere where extremist ideologies not only thrive but actively plan attacks from behind bars.

Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood’s snap review on the use of stab vests and the proposed trial of Tasers for specialized officers indicates a reactive rather than proactive approach. Officers currently rely on batons and Pava spray, weapons that many deem woefully inadequate given the escalating violence. Compounding this is a staffing crisis, with the number of experienced personnel decreasing sharply; data reveals that just over 30% of officers now have more than ten years of service, leaving a system vulnerable and ill-prepared to confront extreme situations.

Government assertions about a “zero-tolerance approach” feel increasingly hollow in light of the failure to adequately equip officers and confront systemic issues. The establishment of a directorate for Security, Order and Counter-Terrorism aims to address extremism, yet the effectiveness of these measures is undermined by significant implementation gaps. The entities responsible for managing prisons appear unable or unwilling to enforce these strategies effectively, reflecting a troubling lack of resolve.

Moreover, the alarming trend reported by the Prison Officers Association—which indicates that organised crime groups are targeting potential recruits to exploit training mechanisms—casts doubt on the integrity of the correctional system itself. This not only endangers the safety of staff and inmates but also raises fundamental questions about who truly governs these institutions.

As the government grapples with the realities of violence and extremism, it becomes clear that merely arming officers may not suffice. What is needed is a comprehensive reform of the entire culture within the UK's prison system, aligning mentalities with strategies that genuinely enhance security and empower those tasked with maintaining order. The ongoing deterioration of our prisons demands immediate and decisive action—one that moves beyond surface-level solutions to address the deeply ingrained issues plaguing the system.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/tories-in-call-to-arm-specialist-prison-officers-to-counter-islamist-gangs/a525370730.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/prison-service-radicalisation-terrorist-islamist-jails-b2066338.html> - An Independent report reveals that Islamist terrorists have seized control of prison wings, with guards often hesitant to challenge them. The review highlights how extremist offenders are held in high esteem by other prisoners, appointing their own 'emirs' who undermine the authority of prison imams. The report warns that the prison service's failure to address Islamist gangs allows extremists to recruit and plan attacks from within. It also notes that prisoners displaying homemade ISIS flags are not committing offences, as current legislation only deems it illegal if done in a 'public place'.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/apr/16/muslim-prisoners-in-england-more-likely-to-be-subjected-to-force-charity-finds> - A charity's analysis reveals that Muslim prisoners in England are disproportionately subjected to force. Data from nine prisons with higher Muslim populations in 2023 shows that Muslim inmates were involved in a significant percentage of incidents involving rigid bar handcuffs and pain-inducing techniques. For instance, at Belmarsh prison, Muslim prisoners made up 32% of the population but were involved in 43% of incidents with rigid bar handcuffs. The charity criticises the treatment of Muslim prisoners, while the Prison Officers' Association defends the use of force as necessary and proportionate.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-sets-out-new-measures-to-tackle-extremism-in-prisons> - The UK government has announced new measures to combat extremism in prisons, including the creation of a directorate for Security, Order and Counter-Terrorism. Governors are instructed to remove extremist literature and ban individuals promoting anti-British beliefs from Friday prayers. The most dangerous Islamist extremists will be held in 'specialist units' within the high-security estate. The initiative aims to equip prison officers with the necessary training and authority to prevent extremist prisoners from exerting control and radicalising others.
5. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prisons-hmp-jail-officers-daniel-khaliffe-b2410020.html> - An analysis by The Independent reveals a staffing crisis in UK prisons, with thousands of experienced officers resigning, leaving jails vulnerable to increased violence and gang control. In 2017, 60% of officers had over 10 years of experience; by June 2024, this had dropped to around 30%. The loss of experienced staff has led to instability, with new, less experienced officers lacking the confidence to handle violence and organised crime. Experts warn that this trend is creating a 'vicious cycle' of increased violence and staff departures.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/22/organised-unit-expanded-in-prisons-in-england-and-wales-to-fight-escalating-gang-activity> - The UK government is expanding its serious organised crime unit to tackle escalating gang activity in prisons across England and Wales. The unit, which monitors and disrupts organised crime gangs in 123 prisons, is being 'beefed up' to address the growing influence of criminal gangs. The expansion aims to counteract the 'toxic culture' brought by serious organised criminals exploiting vulnerable prisoners. The initiative reflects deepening concerns that criminal gangs are taking control of prisons, with over 10% of prisoners estimated to be involved in organised crime.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/sep/27/organised-crime-gangs-uk-sending-recruits-to-train-as-prison-officers-union-warns> - The Prison Officers Association warns that organised crime groups are recruiting individuals to train as prison officers with the intent to smuggle contraband into prisons. The union highlights concerns that some recruits are entering the service solely to bring in illicit items, exploiting the training and pay system. This practice poses significant risks to prison security and the safety of staff and inmates, as it undermines efforts to control the flow of contraband and maintain order within the prison system.