



Belfast burns, while Met chief points finger at Iran and Russia

Description

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Race riots, 10 June, Belfast

On 11 June, Met Police chief Sir Mark Rowley appeared on *Sky News* to discuss the Belfast ["race-based pogroms"](#) following a ["horrific stabbing attack"](#) days earlier.

Far-right politicians and pundits, with the help of tech mogul Elon Musk, love nothing more than turning tragedy into a PR stunt. They ["whip up fear and hate across the UK"](#) towards Black and Brown people. Meanwhile, ["white supremacist thugs"](#) have taken to the streets of Belfast, setting fire to the homes and ["terrorising local residents."](#) It is clear that the situation in Belfast has implications far beyond the city's limits.

When asked about the racist pogroms, Rowley turned the conversation antisemitism. Even when Muslim homes in Belfast have been targeted by white rioters, our institutions insist ["antisemitism is the main concern."](#)

Rowley even took the opportunity to criticise Russia and Iran ["but made no mention of Israel's genocide"](#) This, once again, exposes the well documented ["hierarchy of racism in the UK"](#)

Asked about Belfast Mark Rowley talks about people overseas whipping up division to create disorder & he specifically mentions Russian & Iranian state actors

Its not Russia & Iran orchestrating the far right violence we're seeing, but Rowley has a job to do & he's doing it pic.twitter.com/KCMcDd2GLY

["Saul Staniforth \(@SaulStaniforth\) June 11, 2026"](#)

Protests or racist riots?

When asked whether the chaos counted as protests or riots, Rowley deflected (*on script*), pointing to foreign threats – Russia and Iran. Israel’s influence, and the UK government’s complicity, went entirely unmentioned.

Rowley described the violence as “violent disorder” and blamed overseas bot farms for “whipping up sentiment” on the streets of Belfast. Yet in doing so, he avoided acknowledging the racialised nature of the attacks or the fear felt by Belfast’s Black and Brown communities. This is a pattern we’ve seen before – downplaying Islamophobia at home by obsessing over “external” threats.

Sophie Ridge: Would you describe what we think in Belfast as protests or riots?

Rowland: I was watching a bit of news last night, I can’t remember what channel it was, but these protesters – that isn’t protest. That isn’t protest. People are setting fire to cars.

That’s not protest. That’s violent disorder. I really feel for the police service in N Ireland, I think it’s really difficult in these volatile times and we have a lot of um, some of what goes on online whips up sentiment on the street, isn’t it?

Ridge: That’s interesting you say about some of the things that happen online whip up sentiments on the street. What do you mean by that? Is that what we’re seeing now?

Rowland: I think that’s definitely a factor in it. And so, I’m not just talking about polarised debate in this country, on the sort of Southport riots we saw evidence of bot farms overseas being part of the things that were whipping up sentiments here. That’s really dangerous.

We know that there are Russian state actors, Iranian state actors They want to sow discord on the streets of the UK. So, this is a really complex issue we’re wrestling with.

Sophy Ridge: "Are these racist riots rather than protests?"

Hilary Benn: "Well if you are targeting people on the basis of the colour of their skin how else can you describe them? That is racist thuggery, theres no question about it at all"
pic.twitter.com/XBGBtQwdgW

– Saul Staniforth (@SaulStaniforth) [June 11, 2026](#)

Undermining democracy

Shortly after, Ridge asked about social media's role in attempts to "undermine democracy" in the UK. Ironically, Rowley warned about disinformation "while rewriting the story himself. Many of these conversations now circle back to current divides in Belfast.

Rowland: I haven't looked at the details, but I think the government minister was talking about, sort of, changing their policy on disinformation and things online, which is a really sensitive area though, isn't it, because on the one hand, of course no one wants foreign states creating disorder on the streets of the UK. But also, you don't want to suppress free speech within the UK.

And I'm sure that's the government's intent, but it's a really hard thing to do. But this is the complex world we're operating in where people overseas can have a dangerous effect on the country.

Despite widespread reporting of the horrific violence against Muslim communities "which SDLP leader Claire Hanna has labelled a "race-based pogrom" Rowley described the attacks as "horrific," before proceeding to shift to antisemitism.

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Rowley: So, I only know what I've seen on the news, but as it's reported, it seems that some of those fires have been targeted at, sort of, Black and other minorities. That's horrific. And that's not just sort of mindless disorder that's targeted at minorities. That's a really frightening issue.

We've been wrestling in London with hate crime issues, particularly the most intense issues being aimed at Jewish communities. And that's both, sort of, um, on-street hate crime issues between communities, where Jews face the highest levels of any community.

But on top of that, some of that is driven by a threat from the Iranian state, and that's why we're putting more protection around them. That illustrates that tension again about local issues and global issues.

"I read an interview with 2 care workers who were in their house, in the flames.. it was a local vicar who managed to.. talk to the people outside to get them to pause to allow these two women to escape. How is that meant to make you feel in your home? Its absolutely unspeakable" pic.twitter.com/qdMPbtTv2L

"Saul Staniforth (@SaulStaniforth) [June 11, 2026](#)

Doublespeak

Once again, a white official seeks to blame Brown people even as they live in fear across the UK.

Islamophobia has [surged 377 percent](#) which is almost [double](#) the rise in antisemitism. *Tell Mama*, a Muslim-focused monitoring charity, recorded [6,000](#) anti-Muslim hate [incidents in 2024](#) alone. “Unite the Kingdom” rallies and divisive debates over migration have made things worse, and an estimated 80 percent of anti-Muslim hate crimes go unreported.

Time and again, UK officials sideline Islamophobia while elevating antisemitism, often using it to shut down anti-Zionist or anti-genocide criticism. Belfast is now a focal point for this debate.

This is the hierarchy of racism in action, and it needs to be called out.

Featured image via [Charles McQuillan / Getty Images](#)

By [Maddison Wheeldon](#)

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