

# Arresting protesters for climbing on war memorial would be illegal, Rowley says

*That is the head of the Metropolitan police on the little matter of, not the threat to the Cenotaph in Whitehall over Remembrance weekend, but the Pro-Palestinians last night who clambered all over the Royal Artillery Memorial at Hyde Park Corner. And also threatened (or another group of their associates) the cenotaph so that the police had to rush to surround it. And this time they were not dealing with patriots and elderly veterans.*

From the [London Evening Standard](#) and [The Sun](#)

Arresting protesters for climbing on a war memorial after a pro-Palestinian march would have been illegal, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner has said.

Sir Mark Rowley said the move by demonstrators was “unfortunate” and “inflammatory in certain ways” but not against the law as he was questioned about the force’s response to the event on Wednesday. Police must be able to enforce the law impartially rather than “pandering to public opinion,” he told an Institute for Government event on Thursday.

He defended the actions of officers on the ground, describing them as “sensible” in the circumstances, adding: “The officers intervened, as officers often are doing, to try and de-escalate risk of conflict, even when there isn’t explicit power to do it.”

Police last night said they “regret” officers not being close enough to the memorial to prevent anyone from climbing on the memorial . . . It comes as footage appears to show a group of

officers standing idly by – despite a dispersal order covering Westminster being in place between 7.50pm last night through to 2am this morning.

*Breaking: Wow. London police rush to protect the cenotaph war memorial as the angry pro-Palestine protesters who surrounded parliament suddenly began taking to the street.*  
[pic.twitter.com/GyNfSWimXp](https://pic.twitter.com/GyNfSWimXp)

– Andy Ngô 🇻🇳 (@MrAndyNgo) [November 15, 2023](#)

The IfG event was rescheduled after a last-minute meeting in Downing Street between Sir Mark and the Prime Minister over the response to a pro-Palestinian protest, which clashed with the original date.

It comes after Mr Cleverly, (*James Cleverly, the new Home Secretary*) who was a Territorial Army officer in the Royal Artillery, said he would examine whether the police needed new powers. The [Prime Minister's](#) official spokesman said the behaviour of the protesters was “unacceptable” after they climbed onto the Royal Artillery Memorial at Hyde Park Corner, in central London, following a demonstration outside Parliament on Wednesday evening.

A video of the protesters climbing over the statues while carrying Palestinian flags was shared online by Johnny Mercer, the veterans' minister, who noted that it was the only memorial to fallen soldiers in central London.

*🇻🇳AWFUL SCENES: Protesters climbing all over the Royal Artillery Memorial – the police make zero arrests. The level of disrespect is incredible. Look at where they climb on to at the end. I feel sad for my country. This needs to stop now. Police do nothing 🇻🇳* [pic.twitter.com/k9bAQu2gy9](https://pic.twitter.com/k9bAQu2gy9)

– Inc.Monocle (@IncMonocle) [November 15, 2023](#)



Tory MP Neil O'Brien slammed the police response as "pathetic". He added: "This is 'disorderly behaviour' under Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 and they should have been arrested. In 2016 Greenpeace protesters who just put an air pollution mask on the

statue of Nelson were arrested on suspicion of causing criminal damage."

Police said the protesters who climbed on the memorial were a breakaway group from the main march, who had been dispersed at Hyde Park Corner.

*I suppose because they got away with climbing up the [Machine Gun Corps Memorial](#) (left) on Saturday they feel bold.*