

London terror attack: Government 'lied' about police numbers before atrocity, former chief inspector claims

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6/4/2017

A former Metropolitan Police chief has accused the government of "lying" about the number of armed officers on the streets, during an interview in the wake of the London terror attack.

Peter Kirkham, a chief inspector between 1981 and 2002, claimed that the Met was "in crisis" in an interview with Sky News, saying the "extra" officers on the streets were actually officers putting in 16-hour shifts or working on "rare leave days".

Mr Kirkham warned "the streets of London have been lost" to knife crime and accused Theresa May of being "criminally negligent with the safety of the public" as she slashed funding and clamped down on stop-and-search tactics.

Government 'lied' about police numbers before attack, says ex-Met chief

But Mr Kirkham said: "The police service is in crisis as a result of the cuts. They are being dragged from pillar to post. We hear talk of extra police officers on the street.

"They aren't extra, they are officers that have had to have their rare leave days cancelled, they have had their 12-hour shifts that are now done routinely being extended to 16 hours, they are being drawn from other areas."

When Sky News anchor Kay Burley asked him to comment on claims there were more armed officers on patrol than ever before, Mr Kirkham said "people that are alleging that are lying" and confirmed he was referring to the Government.

He warned that the Prime Minister had missed the "most obvious, urgent" remedy needed to protect against terror attacks, which he says is a reverse to "cuts to ordinary policing".

Scotland Yard has recorded a surge in violent, gun and knife crime over the last year, which Mr Kirkham said would get worse if budgets were squeezed further.

- [Police cuts 'mean forces can't terror threat without Army help'](#)
- [Amber Rudd refuses to rule out further police cuts](#)

He told [LBC](#) radio: "Everything we predicted has happened, is continuing to happen, and what we are predicting is that it's going to get worse.

"This Government and Theresa May in particular have been criminally negligent with the safety of the public, and they are getting away with it because of the opposition."

Knife crime jumped by almost a quarter (24 per cent) over the last year, with more than 4,000 offences involving blades resulting in an injury in London.

Mr Kirkham said the rise was an inevitable consequence of the drop in stop and searches, which have been criticised for disproportionately targeting black people.

"The only thing police have got, once they get to the point of kids carrying knives, is stop and search, and the Government's been beating the police up constantly over the last few years saying 'don't do stop and search'," he said.

"Stop and search has plummeted, knife crime has gone up, we all knew it was going to happen, we've been warned about it, the Government, and Theresa May personally, has not listened.

"In fact, quite the contrary, she's told us we're crying wolf and we're scaremongering."

The former officer said not enough police were on the beat in London because of huge cuts.

"We haven't got enough cops to actually put people on the street, that's the main problem really, the streets have been lost. And I would put it as strongly as that," he said.

"The streets of London have been lost because there are not police officers patrolling. Why? Because police officers have been cut, not many numbers in relation to London, but those that have [been cut] have been lost off the front line.

"But 30 per cent of police staff doing all the back room things have been lost, it's a lot. [And] the cops that we theoretically still have, aren't on the front line."

The Met has launched investigations into three separate fatal stabbings in the capital since the start of the week.

Statistics published by the Metropolitan Police show that:

- gun crime increased by more than two fifths (42 per cent) year-on-year with 2,544 offences recorded in 2016/17;
- knife crime jumped by almost a quarter (24 per cent), with more than 4,000 offences involving blades resulting in an injury;
- the total number of offences recorded by the force rose by nearly 4.6 per cent from 740,933 to 774,737;
- violence against the person crimes were up by 4.7 per cent while there were also increases in robberies (12 per cent), sex offences (9 per cent) and theft (7 per cent);
- there were 110 homicides – one more than the previous year;
- and sanction detection rates – the proportion of cases where action is taken against a suspect such as a charge or caution – were down across a number of categories.