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# Muslims criticise Scotland Yard for telling them to engage with EDL

Metropolitan police say English Defence League is 'not extreme', but sends 3,000 officers to planned demonstration



Members of the English Defence League attending a Palestinian demonstration. A Metropolitan police email says the group is 'not extremist'. Photograph: Mike Kemp/ Mike Kemp/In Pictures/Corbis

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Scotland Yard has been accused of underestimating the threat from the [English Defence League](#) (EDL) after the head of the unit monitoring hate groups declared it was not an extremist organisation.

In an email obtained by the Guardian, Adrian Tudway, National Co-ordinator for Domestic Extremism, said he formed the view the EDL were not extreme after reading their website.

Today the EDL, accused by Muslims of fostering hate against them, will stage a "static" demonstration in Tower Hamlets, east [London](#), in one of their most potentially provocative displays so far.

The [Metropolitan police](#) obtained a ban against a planned march through east London by the EDL, fearing clashes with anti-fascist groups and also the

prospect of British Muslim youths taking to the streets to defend their communities against feared racist attacks.

British Muslims have claimed police have not done enough to protect them against the EDL.

In an email sent on 27 April 2011, Tudway told a Muslim group they should try opening up a "line of dialogue" with the EDL, who have been accused of staging attacks and directing hostility at British Muslims.

Tudway wrote: "In terms of the position with EDL, the original stance stands, they are not extreme right wing as a group, indeed if you look at their published material on their web-site, they are actively moving away from the right and violence with their mission statement etc.

"As we discussed last time we met, I really think you need to open a direct line of dialogue with them, that might be the best way to engage them and re-direct their activity?"

Last night Tudway's email was sent to the National Association of Muslim Police, which had been pressing him and his unit for tough action.

Zaheer Ahmad, president of the National Association of Muslim Police, said: "There is a strong perception in the Muslim communities that the police service does not take the threat of right wing extremism seriously. This perception is fast becoming reality when communities witness an inconsistent, somewhat relaxed police approach to EDL demonstrations resulting in very few arrests and prosecutions.

"The community perception is reinforced by the position of the National Domestic Extremism Unit which does not view EDL as right wing extremists.

"There is a considerable body of independent evidence, which is growing at staggering pace, to highlight the serious threat of EDL to our communities."

The national domestic extremism unit used to be run by the Association of Chief Police Officers. But this year it was moved into the Metropolitan police, where it is part of its specialist operations unit.

Tudway's unit was charged with investigating any links between the right wing Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik and the English Defence League.

Defending Tudway's views, the Met police said: "The EDL are not a proscribed group. Police are committed to taking robust action against anyone who causes harm by crossing into criminality in support of any issue."

It did not answer whether the force shared his views that the EDL were not extremist.

Dan Hodges, from anti-fascism charity Searchlight, said the charity had been privately telling police more resources needed to be devoted to countering

the threat of far right violence: "It's staggering given the EDL's record of violence, intimidation and the outspoken support of many of its members for far right wing politicians and politics."

He said police should classify the EDL as extremist and linked to violence and spend more time and effort trying to thwart their plans: "It's difficult to see what further evidence one would want to see them as extremist.

"Every EDL demo ends in disorder and physical violence."

The EDL emerged in Luton and has staged a number of demonstrations over the past two years - many of which have descended into violence. The group came under scrutiny earlier this year after Anders Behring Breivik repeatedly praised it in his 1,500-page manifesto, saying he had 600 EDL supporters as Facebook friends and had spoken with "tens of EDL members and leaders".

Members of the group deny any official contact with Breivik and insist their organisation is peaceful, non-racist and opposed to extremism. A *Guardian* investigation into the EDL found repeated racism and threats of violence among supporters.

Several hundred EDL supporters are expected to meet in two pubs in the Euston area of the capital from around midday on Saturday before being escorted by police to a static demonstration in Tower Hamlets that is due to start at 3pm.

Police chiefs said more than 3,000 officers will be on duty amid fears of violence and unrest.

After a police request, the home secretary agreed to a ban on marches for 30 days across five London boroughs and the City of London.

It will cover Tower Hamlets, Newham, Waltham Forest, Islington, Hackney and the City of London.

Some anti-racist activists are planning to hold a counter demonstration. Unite Against Fascism is holding a static demonstration in Whitechapel with music and speeches from 11am.

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