



By: **Harvey Morris**

It is a brief hot summer of far right thuggery, Elon, not a British civil war



It is scarcely a month since overseas commentators were patiently explaining to their audiences how it was that UK voters had bucked a far-right trend elsewhere in Europe by handing a landslide victory to the centre-left.

This week they are having to tell them how it is that brick-wielding mobs of far-right extremists and hangers-on have paralysed parts of towns and cities across the country for days on end, claiming to be the true Brits.

Elon Musk had a crack at it from a safe distance, **concluding** that “civil war is inevitable”. Perhaps he had been reading too many of the dubious posts on his social media platform X.

Britain is not facing a civil war, or anything remotely like it. The disturbances, in which police and innocent civilians have been injured, buildings torched and some 400 people arrested, will inevitably fade.

They nevertheless represent the first major crisis for the Labour premiership of Sir Keir Starmer, the former director of public prosecutions who said the rioters, whose targets included mosques and hotels housing asylum-seekers, would face “the full force of the law”.

Mayhem on the streets

The worst unrest on Britain’s streets for more than a decade broke out after an election in which a Conservative pledge to stem illegal migration, pegged to its unworkable Rwanda relocation scheme, failed to break through to an electorate more focussed on the cost of living and the decline in public services.

The assorted conspirators and camp-followers who make up what amounts to the extreme right in Britain represent few beyond themselves, which is not to say that they are incapable of briefly sowing mayhem on the streets.

They are not in it for a debate on immigration

or on anything else. They are in it for the fight.

The rest of the country will hopefully soon be able to look back on the rioting as a brief mid-summer aberration

The rest of the country will hopefully soon be able to look back on the rioting as a brief mid-summer aberration. Whatever the fantasies of those who spurred the violence, it is not facing the emergence of some widespread grassroots movement.

The extreme right’s challenge in Britain is that it has always been regarded as a bit of a joke, albeit a very sick one.

The would-be storm troopers

From the preening Sir Oswald Mosley, who led the pre-World War II British Union of Fascists, to Tommy Robinson, the latest tribune of the people, sunning himself in Cyprus while stirring the pot online, there has always been something faintly comical and un-British about its self-appointed leaders.

Robinson **skipped** to the sunbed to avoid a court hearing in London and, to add to his troubles, his Muslim tax adviser has just dumped him. She accused him of instigating the riots and causing a lot of people to suffer, a sentiment with which most of the public would no doubt agree.

Always angry, even when they are sober, it is hard to distinguish the true believers from the usual opportunists who are always spoiling for a fight

Meanwhile, the would-be storm troopers that he and other online influencers have been spurring on to the streets, have been making life a misery for locals and instilling fear among established immigrant communities, while

frequently making fools of themselves.

Always angry, even when they are sober, it is hard to distinguish the true believers from the usual opportunists who are always spoiling for a fight.

Starmer's response has been to threaten swift justice and harsh sentences to offenders, a policy that could deter at least the hangers-on, as it did during riots in 2011 when he was in charge of prosecutions.

Musk's "civil war" posting

There are longer term issues to be addressed, not least the impact of social media in allowing the propagation of false and inflammatory material with the intention to provoke violence. Musk's "civil war" posting, and Downing Street's swift rejection of it, did not bode well for any conversations on the issue with the X boss.

Security services must also confront the growing threat they have identified of targeted terrorist attacks, such as the murder of MP Jo Cox in 2016 by a since-convicted right-wing extremist, and the far-right grooming of vulnerable young people.

In the meantime, mainstream politicians and media pundits should avoid becoming the far right's unwitting fellow travellers by condemning the violence while suggesting that the perpetrators somehow have a point.



Tommy Robinson may already have had a long, hot summer in mind a week before the Southport deaths

One elected Conservative police commissioner, Donna Jones, arguably fell into the trap when she issued a statement that "the protest groups appear to be focused on three key areas - the desire to protect Britain's sovereignty, the need to uphold British values and, in order to do this, stop illegal immigration".

The statement was subsequently dropped from her official website but she said she stood by the comments.

Nigel Farage, a newly-elected MP for his right-wing Reform Party, had previously suggested a cover-up about the identity of the suspected killer of three young girls in Southport, the event that sparked the first violent protests. The suspect's false identification on social media as a Muslim asylum seeker was the catalyst that fuelled the violence.

Brendan Cox, husband of the late Jo Cox, said Farage's contribution to the conspiracy theories made him nothing better than "Tommy Robinson in a suit".

The real Tommy Robinson may already have had a long, hot summer in mind a week before the Southport deaths, having led a "patriotic show of force" by up to 30,000 far-rightists in central London.

The unrest may continue but it usually the ferociously committed extremists who are the first to give up.

After the Mussolini-mimicking Mosley emerged from internment after World War II, the former fascist leader formed the far-right Union Movement. An early memory from the late 1950s is of his acolytes staging a torchlight parade through my neighbourhood.

I sneaked out to thumb my juvenile nose at them. Worse still, the rain came on. That clearly proved too much for them, for both the march and the torches fizzled out.