

**ij@uk2**

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**Subject:** [iraqcampaign] Britain becomes pathetic - would they rather people die?

Can the police ever say 'not for me'?

By Tom Geoghegan

BBC News

**The dispensation granted to a Muslim police constable guarding the Israeli embassy during the Lebanon conflict has been criticised as a breach of police protocol. So in what circumstances could such a request be justified?**



The importance of serving all sections of the community is drummed home to trainee police officers before they even enter the classroom or get their uniforms.

**Policing in Belfast can test loyalties**

In the presence of a senior officer in full uniform, all new recruits take a solemn oath.

At the Metropolitan Police, they say:

*“I (name) do solemnly and sincerely declare and affirm that I will well and truly serve our Sovereign Lady the Queen in the office of Constable, without favour or affection, malice or ill will; and that I will, to the best of my power, cause the peace to be kept and preserved, and prevent all offences against the persons and properties of Her Majesty's subjects and that while I continue to hold the said office I will, to the best of my skill and knowledge, discharge all the duties thereof faithfully according to law.”*

Pc Alexander Omar Basha, of Scotland Yard's Diplomatic Protection Group, was excused from guarding the Israeli Embassy for safety reasons, the Met have said.

Initially it was reported that his request was accepted on political and moral grounds because he objected to Israeli foreign policy. And a Scotland Yard spokesman said it would consider special requests to be moved on moral grounds.

But the Association of Muslim Police Officers insisted this was a "welfare issue" because the officer had felt unsafe for himself and his family because of his Middle Eastern background.

John O'Connor, a former commander of Scotland Yard's flying squad, said police dealt with welfare issues all the time and a common example was when an officer lived in an area of high crime and requested a move because he feared for his friends and family.

**“ I can't think of any moral grounds for refusing to do your duty, which is what you are paid to do ”**

John O'Connor  
 Former Scotland Yard

If Pc Basha had had safety concerns as the war in Lebanon escalated, he should have been transferred off the unit immediately, he said - a point echoed by several former officers who served on that unit and contacted the BBC News website.

### [Inquiry into embassy row](#)

"But I can't think of any moral grounds for refusing to do your duty, which is what you are paid to do and what the public pays you to do," said Mr O'Connor.

"If he said 'I don't want to do this job because I don't agree with Israeli foreign policy', he should be disciplined because he's bringing the force into disrepute.

"He should not be on the force because it means he can't abide by the oath of allegiance.

"The oath we take is to the Queen and it's to uphold the law and to act in a totally impartial way and treat everyone equally."

### Love and duty

There have been several areas of conflict in recent years where UK police officers may have found themselves in a compromised position.

Peter Bleksley, a former Scotland Yard detective and now a crime writer, said that after an undercover drugs operation, the IRA put a contract out on his head and he had an Irish Catholic girlfriend whose family were republican.

#### HAVE YOUR SAY

“ **The police cannot ever let their personal feelings interfere with their work** ”

Miki, London

[Send us your comments](#)

"Did I allow the political leanings of the woman I loved and lived with to affect what I was doing?"

No I didn't. I worked to the best of my ability.

"All political, religious, personal and sexual leanings must be parked at the front door of the police station.

"Are Arsenal fans going to say they're not going to police Tottenham games? By natural extension it could go that way."

He said the vetting process to join the Diplomatic Protection Unit, in which officers are permanently armed, should check applicants are of sound body and impartial mind.

The miners' strike was another difficult period for officers, recalled Rick Naylor, president of the Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales.



The miners' strike divided families

He said: "I can remember in my part of the world in South Yorkshire during the miners' strike where I was on the opposite side of picket lines to friends and neighbours.

"So police officers are asked every day to do things that sometimes they may feel uncomfortable with, but on principle police officers join the service to do their duty without fear and favour, and the public rely on that."

#### 'Dangerous road'

Other senior officers said that personal reasons could also be a factor, such as losing a child and then being reluctant to investigate a cot death. Or being connected to a murder case which involved a relative.

In Northern Ireland, some Catholic officers may have had republican

sympathies, said former superintendent Lord Mackenzie, but he was unaware of any officers of either religion being moved off duties.

"If officers have political, religious, ideological or moral views about things - and all officers will do - then they have got to put their duties above that because their service is to the public," he said.

"Once we start going down the road of granting these dispensations, it raises all sorts of difficult questions."

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