

Blow for the Met as top police chief is called in to lead urgent review of Tory MP arrest fiasco

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Scotland Yard's investigation into Tory MP Damian Green was thrown into doubt today after one of Britain's most senior police chiefs was asked to urgently review the case.

Acting Met Chief Sir Paul Stephenson, who originally approved Mr Green's arrest, has appointed British Transport Police chief Ian Johnston to carry out an inquiry.

Sir Paul said he had ordered the review because he was 'properly concerned' by the row over the probe into Home Office leaks to the shadow immigration minister.

Gordon Brown also hinted there may be other inquiries into the handling of the case - which led to accusations Britain was now a police state - further down the line.

'There is going to be a time when all these things are going to be investigated and reviewed after the police have finished their work,' he said.



Inquiry: British Transport Police chief Ian Johnston, right, has been appointed to review the Met's investigation into Tory MP Damian Green (pictured today, left)

The inquiry into Mr Green's arrest was authorised by Assistant Commissioner Bob Quick, who is in charge of anti-terror operations, and approved by Sir Paul.

The police chief will conduct an 'urgent review of our decisions, actions and handling of the investigation to date', the acting Met Chief said.

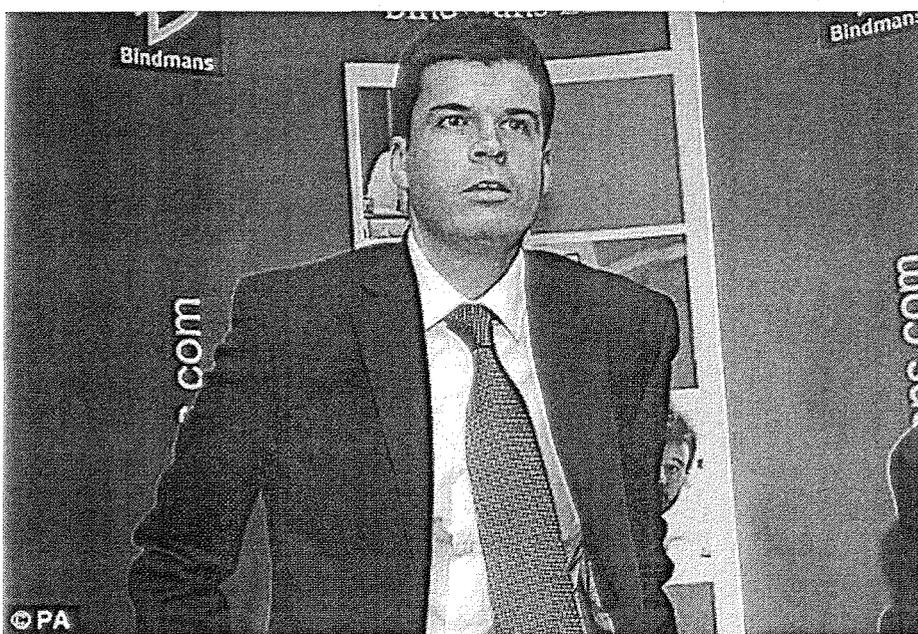
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Mr Johnston, 63, will have to report his initial findings within seven days and his full report in a fortnight.

The former assistant commissioner and chair of the Association of Chief Police Officers' crime committee is no stranger to dealing with sensitive issues at the Met.

He was chosen 10 years ago to apologise for the force's handling of the Stephen Lawrence murder investigation and also managed the response to the July 7 bombs.



Whistleblower: Civil servant Christopher Galley yesterday. He was arrested and questioned for 17 hours by police over alleged leaks to Mr Green

Mr Green, Tory MP for Ashford, was arrested and held for nine hours on Thursday as police raided his home and offices before being released on police bail until February.

Politicians from all sides were horrified, claiming Britain had become a police state. The Tories branded the swoop 'Stalinesque'.

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith and the Prime Minister both came under fire amid claims they could not possibly have been left unaware of the Yards' plans.

Former shadow home secretary David Davis said today: 'It [the inquiry] is frankly, the first sensible thing that has happened in this whole exercise.'

Miss Smith also welcomed the move and revealed she had already sought assurances from Sir Paul that the investigation was 'proportionate'.

'In view of the gravity and sensitivity of this ongoing investigation, I spoke to Sir Paul yesterday to seek his assurance that the investigation was being pursued diligently, sensitively and in a proportionate manner,' she said.

'Sir Paul informed me of his intention to conduct a review of the handling of the case, which I welcomed.'



Under pressure: Jacqui Smith at a Cabinet Meeting today

Mr Johnston took over as head of the BTP, which polices Britain's railways, in 2001 after retiring from the Met and earns £200,000 a year.

Because the BTP is under the control of the Transport Department and not the Home Office, he can also claim a full pension - making him Britain's best-paid policeman.



Review: Acting Met chief Sir Paul Stephenson

His appointment came amid concern among many senior police officers and police authority officials at how the case has been handled.

CPS lawyers already believe that charges would not be in the public interest and there would be little chance of securing convictions.

Publicly, the force insisted yesterday that it was business as usual and officers were continuing their inquiries into Mr Green and Home Office whistleblower Chris Galley, suspected of leaking confidential documents to him.

Privately, however, a number of influential police figures believe the inquiry is likely to be abandoned by Christmas.

The new Director of Public Prosecutions, Keir Starmer, has distanced himself from the case - insisting his lawyers played no part in the decision to arrest Mr Green and raid four addresses linked to him.

A senior legal source said: 'There is little or no appetite for this inquiry to continue. The Green case is going nowhere - so the main challenge now is finding a face-saving way to halt the investigation.'

Scotland Yard insiders described the force as being in a state of near turmoil.

They said that after months of in-fighting and demoralisation towards the end of Sir Ian Blair's reign, the last thing officers needed was to be dragged into another huge political row.



Raids: A police officer removing items from Mr Green's constituency in Bethersden, Kent, after his shock arrest last week

Yesterday the two senior Met officers at the centre of the storm applied to succeed Sir Ian as Yard chief.

Acting Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson and Assistant Commissioner Bob Quick, head of anti-terror operations, have both been heavily criticised.

Sir Paul sanctioned Mr Quick's decision to launch the operation against Mr Green. Both had been said to be reconsidering their application for Scotland Yard's top jobs.

But they were among the candidates who applied for the £253,000 a year post as the deadline passed yesterday.

Before the Green affair, Sir Paul was seen as the front-runner. But the odds against him have lengthened considerably after he faced suggestions that he sanctioned the arrest of Mr Green to 'curry favour' with Home Office power brokers.

The contenders will be interviewed by a panel headed by Sir David Normington, the Home Office's top mandarin, and the man who asked police to investigate the embarrassing-leaks.

The final decision will be made by Home Secretary Jacqui Smith.