

## **UK Police Operation Talla, UK Regulators and how dissenting voices were silenced**

Operation Talla was the UK-wide police coordination effort established in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was led and managed through the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) to provide strategic oversight, operational guidance, and logistical support for all UK police forces during the public health emergency.

### **◆ Key Facts About Operation Talla**

#### **1. Purpose:**

To coordinate policing activities across the UK in response to Covid-19.

To ensure consistent and lawful enforcement of public health legislation and lockdown rules.

To provide support and guidance to officers dealing with new and complex challenges during the pandemic.

#### **2. Structure:**

Led by the NPCC.

Utilised the UK's Gold-Silver-Bronze command structure.

Gold Command handled strategic decisions.

Silver Command implemented operational plans.

Bronze Command handled on-the-ground decisions.

#### **3. Activities Under Operation Talla Included:**

Monitoring and enforcing Covid-19 restrictions, such as social distancing, quarantine, and mask mandates.

Protecting NHS sites, vaccine distribution centres, and public health workers.

Responding to anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine protests, including managing civil disobedience and disinformation threats.

Coordinating logistics for PPE distribution and officer safety.

Supporting vulnerable communities and individuals affected by the pandemic.

#### **4. Legacy and Documentation:**

Operation Talla included daily and weekly briefings, internal policies, and coordination with Public Health England, the NHS, and the Cabinet Office.

It also oversaw police engagement policies related to public gatherings, protests, and vaccine-related tensions.

### ◆ **Critical Context**

Operation Talla became symbolic of the balancing act between civil liberties and public safety during the pandemic. While it aimed to enforce the law consistently, it also attracted criticism from some civil society groups and campaigners concerned about over-policing, freedom of speech, and the criminalisation of dissent.

Operation Talla, while not directly regulating doctors, had a significant indirect influence on how regulatory bodies such as the General Medical Council (GMC) and the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) operated during the Covid-19 pandemic—especially in cases where doctors expressed dissenting views on government or NHS policy.

Here's how Operation Talla's functions likely influenced these regulators:

#### **1. Coordinated Narrative Enforcement**

Operation Talla was a national police coordination body designed to manage Covid-19 enforcement. Through the Gold/Silver/Bronze command structure, it worked closely with NHS bodies, government agencies, and public health officials. This structure helped maintain a consistent public health message and framed certain types of dissent as potentially harmful or criminal.

This had downstream effects on regulators:

The GMC was under public and institutional pressure to act on doctors who were perceived to be undermining public confidence in NHS or vaccine policy.

In some cases, doctors raising concerns about vaccines or lockdown measures were referred for fitness to practise investigations, not because of patient harm but due to perceived reputational risk or "misinformation".

#### **2. Influence on Policing and Risk Reporting**

Operation Talla also developed guidelines for officers to log vaccine-related "intimidation" incidents and pseudo-legal complaints under specific operations.

This led to:

A categorisation of dissenting legal or professional speech (e.g., criticisms of vaccine rollout) as potential public order issues.

Regulatory bodies relying on police intelligence or complaints arising from such operations to trigger investigations into doctors' conduct.

Example: Doctors who shared anti-vaccine sentiments or legal critiques online were more likely to face regulatory complaints—sometimes originating from police referrals or coordinated campaigns.

### **3. Framing of "Misinformation" as a Disciplinary Matter**

Operation Talla worked closely with government disinformation teams and public health communicators. As a result:

The GMC adopted a stricter stance on what constituted acceptable professional speech during the pandemic.

Regulatory cases were opened based on whether a doctor's statements might "erode public confidence" in the NHS or vaccine efforts—even without evidence of patient harm.

This led to allegations of selective enforcement and overreach, particularly in high-profile cases involving doctors critical of Covid-19 policy.

### **4. Suppression of Whistleblowing and Professional Dissent**

Drawing parallels with historical episodes (e.g., doctors silenced during the contaminated blood scandal), Operation Talla's climate may have contributed to:

A chilling effect where doctors felt unable to speak openly without regulatory threat.

Reports of NHS employers threatening doctors with GMC referral for raising safety concerns, even where those concerns were grounded in clinical judgment or ethical obligations.

### **Summary**

While Operation Talla did not directly govern the GMC or MPTS, its policies created a high-pressure environment where:

Policing priorities around public order and misinformation heavily influenced regulatory expectations of doctors.

Regulators often mirrored Operation Talla's framing of dissent as reputational risk or threat.

This, in turn, contributed to contested and controversial fitness to practise proceedings, especially against doctors who challenged official Covid-19 narratives.

### **Ethical Approach UK**

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