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■New: For months, @hackneylad and I have been looking at what's going on @ukhomeoffice and how it became the department we see today.

My task was to speak to current staff and to get as close to Priti Patel as possible. Here's what I found out. (Thread)

<https://t.co/YRc4Rc70Dd>

2/ Every morning, Priti Patel arrives at Marsham Street at around 7.30 and goes up to her office on the third floor.

Behind her desk, there are two union jack flags and facing her, there's a whiteboard with her top priorities.

At the top: '1: Stop small boat crossings.'

3/ On that whiteboard, there are around twenty other priorities - deport foreign national offenders, cut crime... - with Windrush compensation payments towards the bottom.

4/ Staff describe the atmosphere in that small office as "adrenaline-fuelled", with one former aide saying that they would deliver updates into the Home Secretary's office, return to their desk and "wait for an explosion".

5/ Another said it is clear she knows she is perceived as a bully - and attempts to appear otherwise come across as "disingenuous". Even after a 12-hour day, Priti Patel's mannerisms are "deliberate and constructed, exactly as you see on TV." The mask never slips.

6/ There's a rota for the Private Secretaries, so there will always be one in the office before Priti Patel arrives in the morning, with the remaining ten or so staff arriving soon afterwards.

7/ While there's no real structure to the day, with "little grenades" constantly disrupting other work, there is time set aside to go through high security documents, including national security threats, which she will sign off herself.

8/ One source told me there's a constant sense that control is slipping away. Part of everyday parlance is "What will the next Windrush be?" and there's a 'Daily Mail test', where staff are told to consider whether any correspondence could appear on the Mail's front page.

9/ One of my sources noted that the culture of the department mimics the hierarchy in policing, with some staff walking around in police uniforms which, they said "makes it feel like a law enforcement organisation". When that sense of law and order is challenged, Ministers react

10/ In summer 2021, Chris Philp wanted to debut the 'new maritime tactic', or 'pushbacks'. It was his last week at the Home Office and he was very keen to roll it out before he left, so he ran a practice exercise...

11/ ...with two Border Force boats, or cutters, either side of a dinghy, attempting to turn it around... but, the cutters both got broken.

12/ At a meeting, Chris Philp was said to be "spitting with anger" the boats were broken and that his big success story had failed. After that, the Home Secretary, Ministers and aides began receiving twice-daily reports into their inboxes with information about wave heights.

13/ One contact said processing asylum claims on the Ascension Islands was definitely considered, with economic modelling drawn up, including the cost for a new runway, increased school capacity and other factors taken into consideration. Then... Rwanda.

14/ The Rwanda plans were led by the Foreign Office at first, with a shortlist of 30 countries drawn up. Some - like North Macedonia and Brazil - said no immediately, whereas others, like Ghana, Nigeria and, of course, Rwanda, were more

interested.

15/ The plans have been a flashpoint for many staff. One senior official who has worked for the department for nearly two decades said morale is the lowest they've ever known it, saying "it wasn't fit for purpose when I joined, and it's even less fit for purpose now."

16/ Another said there is "a rule of fear" that seems to permeate Marsham Street, preventing people from speaking out - they're worried they'll be cut out of the loop, and, "that does happen".

17/ Among those who do speak out, dissent is quickly quashed. When one junior member of staff addressed the use of language that surrounds asylum seekers - they're routinely spoken of as 'stocks and flows' - they were told "junior colleagues need to learn how to raise issues."

18/ Another said: "It's like a part of you dies walking in there". There's a sense (which I shared when I worked at Marsham Street) that you are constantly morally compromised. But it's a great place for young, ambitious people to cut their teeth and get ahead.

19/ I was told that what those young people say at the pub is very different to what they say in the office. At the pub, it's "Obviously these policies are shit, but what's the alternative?" If a suggestion is made, they'll say "That's not going to be palatable to Ministers".

20/ There's a feeling of powerlessness, with one insider saying: "The machine will grind on, whether you're on top or under the wheels. You've got to just keep your head down and power on."

21/ You can listen to our [@tortoise](#) deep dive here, including Jack's brilliant interviews with former Home Secretaries, Permanent Secretaries and senior civil servants. Huge thanks to [@Geordiedav](#) for indulging our street recordings and generally being great to work with.