

Spies told to come clean on Cameron's order to kill

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Reyaad Khan, from Cardiff, was killed by a Hellfire missile fired by a Reaper drone



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The MPs who are investigating the country's first extrajudicial killing of a British jihadist in a drone strike in Syria have accused the intelligence services of holding back information about the threat he posed and the risk of "collateral damage" during the strike.

The intelligence and security committee (ISC), headed by the former attorney-general Dominic Grieve, has warned intelligence officials that it is "dissatisfied" with the information they have provided so far on the 2015 attack.

The ISC submitted its draft report to Downing Street in December expressing its frustration. The intelligence services claim the committee is going beyond its remit by questioning the military decision-making

behind the drone attack rather than focusing on the intelligence.

At the heart of the dispute are concerns that David Cameron's claim that the jihadist, Reyaad Khan from Cardiff, was an "imminent" threat to Britain had been flawed and may not have justified the attack. Khan was killed by a Hellfire missile fired by a Reaper drone.

It is understood that the committee is also concerned that the military attack failed to consider properly the "collateral damage" in the attack on August 21, 2015 which claimed the lives of two other jihadists — one of whom was another British citizen, Ruhul Amin from Aberdeen.

"Dominic is suspicious that the legal advice wasn't as rigorous as it should have been," a government source said. "It's not easy to reach a threshold of that which would justify a drone attack. Dominic would have thought it's very surprising.

“ Many intelligence officials were opposed to the extrajudicial killing

"[As a former attorney-general] he knows where to look and what to look for — and he's not afraid to put noses out of place." At the time Grieve had described the attack as "draconian", adding: "I strongly suspect it would lead to a legal challenge."

The airstrike in Raqqa was the first by the RAF in Syria and the first such attack where Britain was the key participant and not simply supporting the United States. It marked a significant escalation in the UK's military mission in the region, coming two years after the Commons voted against carrying out airstrikes in Syria.

Cameron told the Commons that the killings, using Reaper drones controlled by British military officers, were "entirely lawful" and the government had exercised Britain's "inherent right to self-protection".

The government argued that there was legal cover for attacks on anti-terrorist operations — such as on targets plotting attacks on Britain — without the need for a parliamentary vote.

Downing Street said at the time that full details of the legal justification by the attorney-general Jeremy Wright would not be published, echoing the controversy over the legal justification for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 given by Tony Blair's government.

As evidence of the threat posed by Khan, Downing Street said two events in 2015 — VE Day in May and Armed Forces Day in June — had been targeted by him. But both events had taken place before Khan was killed in August.

An intelligence official opposed to the strike said that while Khan had gone on to become a poster boy for Isis and a prolific Twitter user who acted as a propagandist, there was no evidence that he posed an imminent threat.

“The imminence related to inspiring attacks around the world but there was not a specific attack to pin them down,” the source said.

“Many intelligence officials were opposed to the extrajudicial killing, not because we're opposed to defeating Isis but because we weren't convinced that drone strike reached the legal threshold.”

Another intelligence official familiar with the “discussion and debates” in the lead-up to the attack said several officials from MI5 and GCHQ had questioned the imminence of the threat posed by Khan.

The legal basis for the drone strike of self-defence is spelt out in article 51 of the UN charter. The “Caroline principles” state the threat must be “instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means and no moment of deliberation”.

The ISC, which scrutinises the activities of MI5, MI6 and GCHQ, has now been accused by intelligence officials of going “beyond its remit” in asking questions relating to collateral damage, saying it should focus on the intelligence on which the strike was based and not on the “decision-making behind the attack”.

“The decision-making was not an intelligence operation but a military one — and that goes beyond the ISC remit,” one intelligence official said.

“But it seems the ISC has an axe to grind and wants to establish its credibility under Dominic by not appearing to be uncritical of government.”

Grieve said he would “examine the intelligence which led to the decision to conduct the operation” in a letter sent in January 2016 to Harriet Harman, chairwoman of the joint committee on human rights. He said he would also question “how serious and imminent was the threat”.

Grieve refused to comment this weekend but a source close to the committee said he had “given teeth” to the ISC. “The report is with the prime minister,” the source said.

“We would expect parts of it to be redacted. We are waiting to hear from No 10. There are areas of disagreement.”

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Bob Hamilton Standard Feb 20, 2017

From the risk-management point of view, anyone who deliberately adopts a philosophy of lethal violence to advance their political/religious agenda is accepting the risk that an opponent may choose to lethally terminate their personal ability to pursue said agenda. Life is not an episode of The Lone Ranger, where the hero knocks out the villain or miraculously shoots the gun out of his hand.