



# INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT



## **PRESS RELEASE: NORTHERN IRELAND-RELATED TERRORISM REPORT**

The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) has today published its Report into Northern Ireland-related terrorism. The Chairman of the ISC, the Rt Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP, said:

“In April 2019 journalist Lyra McKee was fatally shot by a ‘new IRA’ gunman. We condemn the reckless violence that led to her death, and our thoughts and sympathies are with her family and friends.

“This Report is the result of an Inquiry by the previous Committee into the threat from Northern Ireland-related terrorism. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chair of that Committee, the Rt Hon. Dominic Grieve QC, and the former members of the ISC for their work on this.”

The two members of the ISC who served on the previous committee, the Rt Hon. Kevan Jones MP and Stewart Hosie MP, said:

“The number of attacks in 2019 demonstrated that the main Dissident Republican groups are resilient and retain both the intent and capability to cause serious damage. The so-called ‘new IRA’ – responsible for Lyra McKee’s murder – is the most widespread of the four main Dissident Republican groups. However, there appear to be signs suggesting closer cooperation between different groups.

“Dissident Republican groups appear to be continuing to recruit new members – including significant numbers of young people. Unless wider issues are addressed, Dissident Republican groups will continue to offer an appealing ‘brand’ for new generations and the threat will remain. A further problem in seeking to prevent young people from joining Dissident Republican groups is the residual distrust between Republican communities and the security services. We therefore welcome the Government’s efforts to apply the lessons drawn from counter-terrorism work across the UK to Northern Ireland: it is essential that non-national security departments – with better links into the community – are able to provide positive interventions if they spot early-stage involvement in terrorist groups.

“Taking experienced terrorists off the streets through criminal prosecutions is critical to reducing the capabilities and numbers of Dissident Republican groups, and must be a priority for MI5. However, the Inquiry discovered that pursuing criminal justice outcomes remains

challenging, with systemic delays and lenient sentencing. We would urge the Executive and Assembly to consider urgently how criminal justice outcomes can be improved.

“Throughout much of the Inquiry, the so-called ‘Third Direction’ case being heard in the Investigatory Powers Tribunal hung over MI5’s agent-running operations. This case challenged MI5’s ability to authorise agent participation in criminality, which is sometimes necessary in order to maintain their cover or to secure access to intelligence which may save lives or disrupt more serious criminality. The Tribunal ruled in December 2019 that MI5 does have this implied power: if the ruling had gone the other way it would have had serious consequences, increasing the threat to the UK. The Government has now introduced the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Bill, which would put this power on a statutory footing. The Committee has welcomed this in principle – although we must ensure that robust safeguards are in place.

“We commend the efforts of MI5 and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. However, Northern Ireland-related terrorism has not gone away. The threat requires sustained pressure more, now, than ever since any border infrastructure resulting from the UK’s future relationship with the EU will be both a target and a recruiting badge for Dissident Republican groups, and may also reignite the threat from Loyalist groups that have previously held a ceasefire. Whilst we welcome the Government's focus on preventing individuals turning to terrorist activity in the first place, MI5 and police resources on the terrorist threat need to be maintained.”

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) is a statutory committee of Parliament that has responsibility for oversight of the UK Intelligence Community. The Committee was originally established by the Intelligence Services Act 1994, and was reformed, and its powers reinforced, by the Justice and Security Act 2013.
2. The Committee oversees the intelligence and security activities of the UK, including the policies, expenditure, administration and operations of MI5, MI6 (the Secret Intelligence Service or SIS) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). The Committee also scrutinises the work of the other parts of the Intelligence Community, including the Joint Intelligence Organisation and the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office; Defence Intelligence in the Ministry of Defence; and the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism in the Home Office.
3. The Committee consists of nine members drawn from both Houses of Parliament, and appointed by Parliament. The Chair is elected by its Members. The Members of the Committee are subject to Section 1(1)(b) of the Official Secrets Act 1989 and are routinely given access to highly classified material in carrying out their duties.
4. This Report was prepared by the previous Committee:
  - The Rt Hon. Dominic Grieve QC MP (Chair)
  - The Rt Hon. Richard Benyon MP
  - Stewart Hosie MP
  - The Rt Hon. Caroline Flint MP
  - The Rt Hon. David Hanson MP
  - The Rt Hon. the Lord Janvrin GCB GCVO QSO
  - The Rt Hon. Kevan Jones MP
  - The Most Hon. the Marquess of Lothian QC PC
  - The Rt Hon. Keith Simpson MP
5. The present Committee Members are:
  - The Rt Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP (Chair)
  - Colonel Bob Stewart DSO MP
  - The Rt Hon. Sir John Hayes CBE MP
  - Stewart Hosie MP
  - Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP
  - The Rt Hon. Kevan Jones MP
  - Mark Pritchard MP
  - The Rt Hon. Theresa Villiers MP
  - Admiral The Rt Hon. Lord West of Spithead GCB DSC PC
6. The Committee sets its own agenda and work programme. It takes evidence from Government Ministers, the Heads of the intelligence and security Agencies, officials from UKIC, and other witnesses as required. The Committee makes an Annual Report on the discharge of its functions and also produces Reports on specific issues.

7. The Committee receives highly classified evidence, much of which cannot be published without damaging the operational capabilities of the intelligence Agencies. There is therefore a lengthy process to prepare the Committee's reports ready for publication, which consists of four stages and takes around four months. The fourth stage is for the Prime Minister to confirm under the Justice and Security Act that there is no material remaining in the report which would prejudice the discharge of the functions of the Agencies (by this point this has already been confirmed by the Agencies themselves). It has previously been agreed that the Prime Minister would have ten working days in which to provide this confirmation, before the Report is laid before Parliament.