



# **Intelligence and Security Committee Annual Report 2017-18: Government Response**

Presented to Parliament  
by the Prime Minister  
by Command of Her Majesty

January 2019



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at Cabinet Office, 70 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2AS

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# INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Government is grateful to the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) for its continued independent oversight and scrutiny. On 22 November 2018, the Committee published its 2017-18 Annual Report, covering the period April 2017 to July 2018. The Prime Minister acknowledged and thanked the ISC for their report in a Written Ministerial Statement on the same day.

The 2017-18 Annual Report highlights the wide-ranging work of the Committee across a number of issues. The Government continues to support the Committee's Russia Inquiry. The Government notes the Committee has reported on 'Detainee Mistreatment and Rendition' (June 2018), 'Diversity and Inclusion in the UK Intelligence Community' (September 2018), and 'The 2017 Attacks: what needs to change?' (November 2018), and has responded in full to each of these reports.

This document provides further detail on the Government's response to the recommendations and conclusions contained in the ISC's 2017-18 Annual Report. The ISC's recommendations and conclusions are set out below in **bold**, followed immediately by the Government reply.

**A. We recognise that certainty is difficult in such situations, but we are reassured that the intelligence available supported UK action against the Syrian Regime following the strike on Douma.**

The Government welcomes this conclusion. We collaborated extensively with allies to understand the situation. Both the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' interim report on the Douma attack and the UN Commission of Inquiry's report on the 12 September 2018 support the Government's conclusion that a chemical weapons attack was carried out on Douma on 7 April. The Prime Minister laid out our assessments in Parliament at the time.

**B. We note that there was no agreement at the time about whether sarin had been used together with chlorine and it is now assessed that it was more likely that it was just chlorine.**

The Government notes the Committee's conclusion. Our preliminary assessment was that chlorine had likely (~55% - ~75%) been used, and that there was a realistic possibility (~40% - >50%) of nerve agent use. As the Prime Minister said at the time, chlorine weapons appeared to have been used and subsequent assessment supports this.

**C. It appears to us that the targeting of the sites was less about chemicals having been used in the attacks and more about the possibility of chemicals being used in the future.**

The Government does not comment on specific targeting decisions. Targets were selected on the basis of rigorous analysis of intelligence and were examined and assessed extensively to ensure that our objective was achieved. In order to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people, our aim was to degrade the Syrian Regime's chemical weapons capability and deter their future use.

**D. The divergence in views amongst the intelligence community on the post-strike analysis is striking. While the initial assessment for Defence Intelligence deemed there to have been a significant disruptive and deterrent effect, the later JIC post-strike analysis was questioning of the impact of the strikes on the capability of the Regime to \*\*\*. This raises serious questions about the value of the strikes and the selection of targets.**

The Joint Intelligence Committee captures a broad range of inputs from experts across Government. Defence Intelligence's initial battle damage assessment in this instance (as usual) was made quickly and based on the available, though partial, evidence. This work was included in the subsequent post-strike assessment which concluded that the action had had a disruptive effect. We continue to work with partners, including through the UN and other international organisations, to ensure that international norms around the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons are upheld.







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