



INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT



PRESS RELEASE: ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2021

The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament published its Annual Report for 2019-2021 today. The Chairman of the ISC, the Rt Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP, said:

"This Report summarises the work of the previous Committee (from July 2019 to November 2019) and the current Committee (from its appointment in July 2020) in scrutinising the work of the UK Intelligence Community. Due to the excessive delay in reconstituting the Committee after the 2019 election, and the failure of the Intelligence Community to meet the deadlines set since then, this Report covers two years: 2019-20 and 2020-21."

The Report covers the Committee's work during this period, including the publication of five reports and three statements and with a further five Inquiries underway. Dr Lewis said:

"There are three issues in the Report which we wish to highlight:

- "The Committee has contributed to three pieces of legislation during the period covered by the Report. Two of the three addressed national security concerns on which the Committee first raised the alarm eight years ago: we therefore welcomed the National Security and Investment Act 2021 and the Telecommunications (Security) Bill as providing the Government with greater powers in respect of investments and the UK telecoms network. However, both pieces of legislation fail to provide for any scrutiny of these new powers.

"While the relevant departmental Select Committees can oversee the policy elements of these new powers, they obviously cannot effectively oversee the security elements since they do not have the requisite security apparatus (security-cleared staff, secure storage, accredited meeting space, etc.). Logically, that oversight responsibility can only fall to the ISC. This Committee was established by Parliament expressly for the purpose of overseeing security matters: when the legislation was enacted, the Government made a clear commitment to Parliament that the ISC would oversee all security matters across Government, with its remit – in terms of organisations scrutinised – being kept updated by way of a Memorandum of Understanding.

"The Government refused to accept the ISC oversight role on either piece of legislation. The Committee chose not to press its amendments in the interests of national security – since had we chosen to do so the Bills would have run out of time and been lost. Nevertheless, we made it clear that oversight must be provided and **in this Report we publish the amendments we consider necessary to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Committee and the Prime Minister, if Government is to honour the commitment it made to Parliament, and which have been put to the Prime Minister.**

- "This Report also raises the serious concerns the Committee had around the behaviour of senior staff within the Intelligence Community. In 2017 the Committee was misled regarding the reasons for the sudden departure of the Head of GCHQ: as the body that is entrusted with oversight of the Intelligence Community, and ensuring their probity, this Committee must be fully informed in such circumstances. **Given the investigative powers with which we trust our Intelligence Community, it is imperative that they are above all suspicion.**
- "We have similar concerns about the actions of some senior staff once they have left the Intelligence Community. It is very surprising to this Committee, knowing how seriously the staff within the Agencies take their duty to safeguard sensitive information, that a previous head of one of the Agencies can appear on television and divulge those secrets and yet no substantive action can be taken. It sends entirely the wrong message – to junior staff about the acceptability of such behaviour, to those who may be tempted to breach those obligations themselves, and to those who risk their lives to protect us. **The question of the obligations of former senior staff within the Intelligence Community – particularly when they seek to build a lucrative career as a commentator on such issues or indeed a lucrative second career in the private sector which utilises the knowledge they have gained – is one which the Committee considers requires further thought and scrutiny, since it appears to be possible to breach the current arrangements with no sanctions resulting.**

“Finally, on the matter of staff, the Committee wishes to pay tribute to the small team which supports it. **The Committee’s staff have – unlike many in the civil service – continued to work full-time in the office. Without this dedication, the Committee could not have fulfilled its oversight function this year, let alone be running more inquiries than at any time in its history.**”

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 M15, M16 (the Secret Intelligence Service or SIS) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and 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 Homeland Security Group 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 I(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 reflects the work of both the previous Committee and the current Committee¹ who were appointed in June 2020;
 - The Rt Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP (Chairman)
 - The Rt Hon. Sir John Hayes CBE MP
 - The Rt Hon. Stewart Hosie MP
 - The Rt Hon. Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP
 - The Rt Hon. Kevan Jones MP
 - The Rt Hon. Mark Pritchard MP
 - Colonel The Rt Hon. Bob Stewart MP
 - Admiral The Rt Hon. Lord West of Spithead GCB DSC
 - The Rt Hon. Theresa Villiers MP
5. 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 across the UK Intelligence Community, and other witnesses as required. The Committee makes an Annual Report on the discharge of its functions and also produces Reports on specific issues.

¹ The membership of the previous Committee was: the Rt Hon. Dominic Grieve QC MP (Chair), the Rt Hon. Richard Benyon MP, the Rt Hon. Caroline Flint MP, the Rt Hon. David Hanson MP, Stewart Hosie MP, the Rt Hon. the Lord Janvrin GCB GCVO QSO, the Rt Hon. Kevan Jones MP, the Most Hon. the Marquess of Lothian PC QC, and the Rt Hon. Keith Simpson MP.