

# Prime Minister Cameron boasts of UK role in targeted assassination of “Jihadi John”

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A US drone strike last Thursday in the Islamic State stronghold of Raqqa in Syria reportedly resulted in the death of British citizen Mohammed Emwazi, better known in the media as “Jihadi John.”

The assassination took place just one day before the Paris terror attacks that killed 129 people, and injured hundreds more. These brutal assaults have been used to ratchet up preparations for further military interventions into Syria and a wider assault on democratic rights.

British Prime Minister David Cameron announced Emwazi’s assassination in a statement from Downing Street. He confirmed that British intelligence had been in contact “around the clock” with its US ally to identify Emwazi.

Jihadi John appeared in a series of gruesome propaganda videos for the Islamic State last year, which featured the beheadings of US journalists Steven Sotloff and James Foley, Japanese journalist Kenji Goto and British aid workers Alan Henning and David Haines.

In line with the argument advanced in September to justify the assassination of two British citizens by an RAF drone, Cameron claimed that the latest extrajudicial killing had been ordered on the basis of Britain’s right to self-defence. “He posed an ongoing and serious threat to innocent civilians not only in Syria, but around the world, and in the United Kingdom too,” Cameron declared. “He was ISIL’s lead executioner, and let us never forget that he killed many, many, Muslims too. And he was intent on murdering many more people. So this was an act of self-defence. It was the right thing to do.”

In truth, the killing, ordered by executive fiat, is illegal under international law.

The fact that targeted assassination has become a routine policy option for imperialist powers was

demonstrated on Sunday when the Pentagon launched an air strike against an ISIS leader in Libya. US army Colonel Steve Warren, who spoke at a briefing Thursday to announce the strike on Emwazi, explained that targeted assassinations had killed senior and mid-level ISIS leaders at a rate of one every two days since May.

The chilling implications of this new trend were indicated by Cameron in his remarks, when he ominously warned anyone who would harm Britain that “we have a long reach.”

Praise for the government’s action was almost universal within the political establishment, with leading Conservative and Labour figures backing the targeted killing. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn avoided explicitly raising the illegal character of the strike when he mildly rebuked the government. Claiming that the assassination meant Emwazi had been “held to account,” Corbyn went on to add, “However, it would have been far better for us all if he had been held to account in a court of law.”

Even this timid criticism was too much for leading Labour members. Labour MP Ian Austin ridiculed any idea of a judicial process, writing sarcastically on Twitter in response, “It’s not as if it’s a really dangerous war zone and I’m sure he’d have come quietly.”

John Woodcock, who chairs the Labour Party defence committee, managed to attack the government from the right and demanded Britain expand its military intervention in the region. “It is notable that the UK had to rely on others to target him because the government chose not to extend its action against ISIS across the non-existent Syrian border,” Woodcock said from Iraq, as part of the UK’s all-party group for Kurdistan.

It was left to the relatives of Emwazi's victims to issue the sharpest criticism of the extrajudicial killing. Diane Foley, the mother of James Foley, criticised the media for "celebrating the killing of this deranged, pathetic young man." "Had circumstances been different, Jim probably would have befriended him and tried to help him," she said. "He wanted to know how we could figure out why—why—all this is happening," she added.

Capturing Emwazi alive would have been "the only moral satisfaction for the families of all the people that he murdered," Haines' widow said after her husband's beheading last year.

Reports paint a picture of Emwazi as a disillusioned young man who grew increasingly angry throughout his teenage years.

He was born in Kuwait and grew up in London. He has been depicted by all who knew him as a quiet, religious child who was bullied at school, but who was radicalised along with others of his generation. Indeed two of his classmates at Quintin Kynaston Academy are thought to have gone to fight in Syria and Somalia.

By 2009, aged 21, he was taking part in a counter-protest to an anti-Islamic demonstration timed to coincide with the eighth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. In 2009, he was deported from Tanzania after intelligence agencies claimed the safari trip he had planned there with his friends was a cover to reach Somalia. On his return, Emwazi claimed MI5 tried to recruit him, an allegation the spy agency has refused to confirm or deny.



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