

UK home secretary revokes Shamima Begum's citizenship, stoking anti-Muslim sentiment

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In a draconian abuse of his powers, UK Home Secretary Sajid Javid has revoked the citizenship of Shamima Begum, who left Britain in 2015 when she was a 15-year-old schoolgirl to join the Islamic State (IS) group in Syria.

A few days ago, Begum gave birth to a son in a Syrian refugee camp.

Javid said he would “use all [his] power” to stop anyone who joined IS from returning to the country, including stripping people of their citizenship, justifying this with the claim that Begum constitutes “a threat to the safety and security of Britain and the people who live here.”

His decision is a blatant attack on democratic rights that effectively makes both Begum and her newborn baby, stranded in a refugee camp, stateless.

Javid implied that she would not be left stateless since she would be entitled to Bangladeshi citizenship. This claim was immediately rejected by the Bangladeshi government as she had never visited the country, held a Bangladeshi passport or even applied for one.

Begum made newspapers headlines when she left Bethnal Green in East London for Syria in February 2015 with Amira Abase, 15, and Kadiza Sultana, 16, joining another girl from the same neighbourhood who had gone to Syria a year earlier. Shortly after her arrival, she married a Dutch Islamist, Yago Riedijk, 12 years her senior, by whom she had two children. Both children died recently as a result of sickness and malnutrition amid the atrocious conditions in the refugee camp.

Her family has appealed to Javid to help secure Shamima and her child's return to the UK “as a matter

of urgency.” Mohammed Akunjee, the family's lawyer, said, “Our position is that to all practical purposes she has been made stateless ... We are considering all legal avenues to challenge this decision.”

It should be noted that the Nazis stripped Jews and opponents of their regime of citizenship in order to deprive them of basic rights. Since then, citizenship has been understood as the “right to have rights.”

Last November, a ruling by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, a superior court of record in the UK that was established by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission Act 1997, ordered the UK government to restore British citizenship to two nationals, known as E3 and N3. Like Begum, they were of Bangladeshi origin, and because of the government's decision, were made stateless.

The ruling invalidates Britain's now routine and increasing use of citizenship deprivation orders. According to government figures, some 104 people were deprived of their citizenship in 2017—up from 14 in 2016—on the grounds that their presence in the UK was “not conducive to the public good.” A further nine temporary exclusion orders were issued in 2017.

Anything that comes out of Javid's mouth is likely to be a lie. For decades, the British government has used Islamist groups for its own ends, both overseas and at home, allowing them to operate out of London. It protected them and used them as proxies to fight for regime change as and when the need arose in line with Britain's constantly shifting foreign policy.

British nationals went to Libya to join Islamist groups in the NATO-led operation to overthrow the country's leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The same Islamist

militias were later shipped off to take part in the next US-sponsored regime-change operation against President Bashar al-Assad in Syria, alongside offshoots of Al Qaeda. A further 900 Britons are believed to have travelled to Syria to join IS as fighters or in other roles, under the watch of then Home Secretary Theresa May.

The British government and security forces worked closely with these terrorist outfits in both Libya and Syria (as well as in covert operations in Central Asia), and then allowed them to return “without hesitation,” helping to spawn a layer of British-born jihadis. These included Salman Abedi, who killed 22 people in a suicide bomb attack at the Manchester Arena in May 2016, and Rachid Redouane, a member of February 17th Martyrs Brigade that killed eight people in the London Bridge/Borough market attack the same year.

Within days of the Manchester and London attacks, the authorities were forced to admit that the perpetrators were known to the police, and that the MI5 intelligence agency had prior warning from the FBI that Abedi had planned a terrorist atrocity. In effect, MI5 gave him a free hand to launch his attack.

It subsequently emerged that Abedi was first allowed to travel and fight in Libya against Gaddafi, before he and his brother received British government assistance to flee Libya *onboard a Royal Navy vessel, HMS Enterprise* in August 2014. Abedi’s presence aboard the ship was known at the highest levels of the British state, with then Prime Minister David Cameron personally informed.

In the case of the three young girls who went to Syria, they were being groomed online. Dal Babu, a friend of the Begum family and former Met police chief superintendent, told BBC Radio’s *Today* programme that the police were fully aware that the 15-year-old Begum was being groomed by IS but failed to tell her parents. “That’s a shocking level of incompetence. The police gave her a letter to say they wanted to interview her, it was found in the schoolbag after she was gone,” he said.

It is entirely possible that instead of being “incompetent,” the police were acting to protect the intelligence services and their Islamist networks that were grooming and recruiting potential jihadis and young girls to serve as their brides.

The Home Secretary’s denunciation of Begum as a “threat to the country’s security” is bogus. She was a

schoolgirl who had three children in less than four years. So far, some 40 percent of the 900 people known to have left Britain to fight with IS have already returned to the UK.

The Syrian Democratic Forces, which is close to capturing the last IS-controlled territory in Syria, say they have captured more than 800 European fighters, and have another 2,200 women and children in their custody, including at least 20 British women and children. Others, including the alleged British members of an IS execution cell—known as the “Beatles”—are among the thousands captured and held in Kurdish-controlled areas following their defeat in Syria.

None of the returnees have been prosecuted, supposedly because police and prosecutors had been unable to build a case for prosecution against most of them. One must ask if this is because they, like the Libyan fighters, might prove to be useful elsewhere in another proxy war? It also raises the question as to why Javid has sought to prevent Begum from returning to Britain. If the authorities have evidence of wrongdoing, why don’t they bring her back and prosecute her? Do they fear what she might reveal?

At the very least, Javid is using the opportunity to whip up a ferocious media storm, stirring up a poisonous atmosphere of xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment. On Wednesday, it emerged that management at a shooting range, Ultimate Airsoft Range, on The Wirral, Merseyside, had authorized the use of photos of Begum for target practice in what can only be described as incitement to a hate crime.

The attack on Begum and her family’s democratic rights must be opposed. They are part of the government and state machinery’s ongoing efforts to eviscerate the entire framework of legal and democratic rights fought for in the course of hundreds of years. Ultimately, the target is not the reactionary Islamist network, but opposition from the working class to the government’s policies of austerity, militarism and war.



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