

Canadian state intelligence asset aided UK schoolgirl Shamima Begum's entry to Syria

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Shamima Begum, groomed online into Islamic State (IS) while a schoolgirl, was helped into Syria by a Canadian state asset. The revelation underscores the way her vilification has been used to legitimise attacks on democratic rights while covering up western imperialist intrigues in the Middle East.

Stripped of UK citizenship, denied legal aid and prevented from returning to Britain to lodge an appeal, Begum, now 23, is held in a detention camp in northern Syria. She renews her case at the Special Immigration Appeals Commission in November.

Begum was 15 when she left London in 2015 to join IS with Amira Abase, also 15, and 16-year-old Kadiza Sultana. In Istanbul they met Mohammed Al Rasheed, who organised their journey into Syria through an IS people-smuggling network based in Raqqa.

Al Rasheed was providing information on the people he smuggled into Syria to the Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS) via the embassy in Jordan. In 2013 he had applied for asylum at the embassy: "They told me they were going to grant me my Canadian citizenship if I collect information about the activities of ISIS."

This is reported in a new book by journalist Richard Kerbaj, a former security correspondent for the *Sunday Times* specialising in intelligence and counter-terrorism. *The Secret History of the Five Eyes*, on the intelligence-sharing agreement between the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, is based on interviews with political leaders and intelligence officials.

Canada played a major role in the imperialist intervention in Syria and Iraq justified in the name of combatting IS, sending fighter jets and hundreds of special forces for a "train and assist" mission alongside Kurdish forces in northern Iraq. It is prominent in the Five Eyes alliance.

An intelligence officer working for a Five Eyes agency confirmed to the BBC Kerbaj's claim that Al Rasheed was passing information to CSIS about people he was transporting. He was arrested in Turkey shortly after Begum reached Syria. Turkish government sources accused Canadian intelligence of helping the girls get to Syria,

although this story was quickly suppressed.

Canadian authorities admitted involvement privately, fearing further public exposure, and successfully sought British assistance in covering it up. At a March 2015 meeting with then Metropolitan Police head of counter-terrorism Richard Walton, CSIS officials hoped their agency would not become the focus of investigation.

Walton told Kerbaj, "If you are running agents you are acquiescing in what they are doing."

The Met were still nominally searching for Begum. They knew Begum was being groomed and a letter saying they wanted to interview her was found in her bag after she left. All evidence suggests that state agencies of more than one imperialist power had a much clearer idea of what Shamima Begum was doing than she did herself.

Begum has now told a BBC podcast that Al Rasheed "organised the entire trip ... I don't think anyone would have been able to make it to Syria without the help of smugglers."

"We were just doing everything he was telling us to do because he knew everything, we didn't know anything."

Both British and Canadian intelligence remain tight-lipped. A CSIS spokesperson told the BBC he could not "publicly comment on or confirm or deny the specifics of CSIS investigations, operational interests, methodologies or activities."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau responded by saying his government would "follow up" the allegations but insisted intelligence agencies must be "flexible" and "creative in their approaches" to fighting terrorism. This is a defence of the virtually unrestricted powers the intelligence agencies have enjoyed since his government came to power in 2015. Bill C-51 legislation allows spy agencies to break almost any law when combatting alleged "terrorist threats."

The Trudeau government has left dozens of Canadians, most of them children, rotting in Syrian prisons because of alleged ties to IS.

British intelligence said, "It is our long-standing policy that we do not comment on operational intelligence or security matters." Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, one of

the few cabinet members to remain in post following Liz Truss's reshuffle, said he could not "comment on intelligence matters" but did not recognise "what's being reported."

Former Home Secretary Sajid Javid, who revoked Begum's citizenship in 2019, told *Good Morning Britain* in September last year, "I'm not going into details... if you did know what I knew, because you are sensible, responsible people you would have made the exact same decision."

That decision was to systematically deprive Begum of legal rights in challenging the removal of her citizenship. Begum was told Javid had declared her stateless by a British journalist. Access to her was controlled by Kurdish authorities. Author Azadeh Moaveni, who has written on IS brides, was not allowed to see her, but there were no obstacles for *Daily Mail* journalists, even though she was not permitted access to her lawyer.

Moaveni said the camp authorities "appeared to be acting on orders from western commanders in the global coalition against IS."

Begum's lawyer Tasnime Akunjee is arguing Begum was the victim of trafficking in his latest appeal. Javid dismissed that claim during previous considerations of her case, but the Al Rasheed revelations show how aware the government was of the situation. Akunjee is also calling for an inquiry into what information the police and intelligence services held.

He commented, "Britain has lauded its efforts to stop ISIS and the grooming of our children by spending millions of pounds on the Prevent programme and online monitoring," he said. "However, at the very same time we have been cooperating with a Western ally, trading sensitive intelligence with them whilst they have been effectively nabbing British children and trafficking them across the Syrian border for delivery to ISIS, all in the name of intelligence gathering."

Legal protections are further threatened. The *Times* reported Jonathan Hall QC, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, arguing that definitions and applications of modern slavery laws are "over broad". Hall complained that a child recruited to a terrorist organisation might automatically be seen as a victim even if they had joined "entirely of their own free will." The repulsive logic here is that it the fault of a child for having been groomed.

The British government is trying to cover its own filthy tracks. It and its close allies, especially the United States, have repeatedly used and tolerated Islamist groups for their own ends.

British nationals and residents joined Islamist groups in the NATO-led operation against Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. These included Khairi Saadallah, who later killed

three people in a terrorist attack in Reading in 2020, and Salman and Hashem Abedi, responsible for the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing. The Abedis travelled freely to and from Libya and were evacuated from the country on a British Royal Navy ship in 2014.

Many Islamist militias were then moved to Syria to join the US-sponsored regime change operation against President Bashar al-Assad, alongside offshoots of Al Qaeda.

The British government and security forces worked closely with these terrorist outfits in Libya and Syria. As the police knew Begum was being groomed online, it is entirely possible that their silence was to protect the intelligence services. She and the other girls she travelled with are part of the collateral damage of their operations.

In Akunjee's words, "The calculation here is that the lives of British children, and the risk of their death, is part of the algorithm of acceptable risk our Western allies have taken."

Abase, one of the girls who left Britain with Begum, committed to IS, and was reportedly killed in fighting in 2018/2019. Disillusioned, the other girl, Sultana, reportedly believed she had made a mistake and was planning to leave Raqqa. She was killed when her residential building was destroyed in an airstrike in 2016.

Begum married Dutch Islamist Yago Riedijk, 12 years her senior, shortly after her arrival. She had two children, who both died as a result of sickness and malnutrition in the appalling conditions of a refugee camp. She gave birth to her third child in al-Hawl detention camp in 2019, just as Javid was revoking her citizenship. The baby died of pneumonia, aged three weeks.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for Shamima Begum's UK citizenship to be immediately restored.



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