



UK Surveillance and the Cover Story for a « Targeted Killing » Programme

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According to Joanna Cherry, a Scottish National Party Member of Parliament, Britain has gone “further than any other Western democracy” in its expansion of surveillance powers and its ability to collect bulk data without justifiable reason. As it turns out, it may be much worse than even that.

The comments were made in reference to the Investigatory Powers (IP) Bill, which is being extended to allow UK intelligence agencies to collect, store and access information about internet users. Really, it should be of some surprise to learn that Britain seems to be the de facto global champion of government surveillance of its own citizens. Not even the Chinese, Russian’s or Korean’s have the astonishing spectrum of snooping tools that Britain now has over its own people.



In part, this is because where American law has forbidden the NSA and its agencies to undertake certain surveillance activities in its own backyard, they have simply [paid Britain to develop the tools needed](#) to do so on their behalf and circumvent their own laws. By contrast, as it becomes more clear, Britain’s surveillance agencies have not let annoyances like the law to hinder its own activities in its home territory.

Cherry was right when she addressed parliament and said “*America has rolled back from bulk collection at the very time that Britain is trying to roll out greater surveillance powers on a statutory basis.*”

There is also a concern about surveillance ‘mission creep’. To highlight the point we only have to look at the Terrorism Act of 2000 in Britain, known as RIPA. Set in the backdrop of the ‘Blair’ years, it was supposed to catch terrorists in the UK planning atrocities but ended up being used by the [BBC to track down non-payment](#) of its mandatory television licence fee. It was also being used by local authorities for non-payment of council tax, capturing evidence of [under-age sun-bed use](#) and even dog-fouling in public places.

[CSO News](#) reports in an article dated 9th Sept that “*While we’re often told surveillance is necessary to prevent terrorism, only 0.9 percent of the data was gathered with the goal of preventing terrorism. The biggest targets of the surveillance were the prevention of drug offenses (24 percent), sexual offenses (12 percent), theft and burglary (9 percent), fraud and deception (8 percent), homicide (6 percent), violence (5 percent), robbery (4 percent), harassment (3 percent), possession of weapons (3 percent), and miscellaneous crimes against society (3 percent). A further 6 percent were vaguely described as “national*

security.” In other words, the vast majority of surveillance is used for domestic policing. The order of importance perhaps gives some insight to the government’s desire to prove its effectiveness in combatting and reporting the crimes of its citizens to its citizens.

But in reality, why are the British government even asking legislators for extended spying operations over its citizenry in the first place? Like it or not, the place where the public gets their information from nowadays on matters relating to state sponsored illegal operations, is Edward Snowden, Wikileaks and whistleblowers, not from a government seeking a mandate via democratic debate.

As if to provide evidence that the government and its surveillance agencies will do exactly as they please, irrespective of law, one only has to look at another story that has recently emerged, again curtesy of Edward Snowden, which the British media have once again completely ignored.



Once known only by the code name Field Station 8613, the secret base at Menwith Hill is located a few miles from a small British town in North Yorkshire

Ryan Gallagher at [The Intercept](#) broke the story of Menwith Hill. No, I hadn’t heard of it either. Once known only by the code name Field Station 8613, the secret base, located a few miles from Harrogate, a small British town in North Yorkshire was a relic of the Cold War, or so we thought. It turns out to be a vital part of the NSA’s and GCHQ’s sprawling global surveillance network. But it’s more sinister than that.

Top-secret documents obtained by The Intercept show how the NSA has used the British base to aid “a significant number of capture-kill operations” across the Middle East and North Africa. The technology used can capture data from more than 2 billion emails and phone calls a week.

Unnervingly, the documents show, the NSA pioneered revolutionary new spying programs, deployed, not in its own territory but in Britain to pinpoint the locations of suspected terrorists accessing the internet in remote parts of the world. Other than spreading the load of illegality, one might ask the question why on British soil?

Menwith Hill is providing support to the US military in covert operations where there is no declared war and where drone bombing is the focus of kill lists that has proven to [snuff-out innocent civilians](#) in 94% or more per target kill – a hot topic in American election politics.



A year on from the Khan Killing as it has become known, [dronewars-uk](#) put together something of a timeline of events leading up to the strike and what has happened subsequently.

All of this raises some new questions though. A few months ago, we found out that David Cameron had authorised the [extra-judicial killing](#) of British subjects Reyaad Khan and his cousin in Syria that led to considerable debate as to its legitimacy, mainly because extra-judicial killing was something the British government had not even supported in WW2. Menwith Hill proves that Britain is complicit in an illegal form of murder and being paid for it – like mercenary missions. What type of war crime does that constitute?

Ryan Gallagher's report also says *"Successive U.K. governments have publicly stated that all activities at the base are carried out with the "full knowledge and consent" of British officials."* That being the case, those officials have likely broken some serious laws.

As the Prime Minister (David Cameron) acknowledged in his [statement to the House of Commons](#), the air strike that killed Khan was a significant departure from previous military operations: *"Is this the first time in modern times that a British asset has been used to conduct a strike in a country where we are not involved in a war? The answer to that is yes. Of course, Britain has used remotely piloted aircraft in Iraq and Afghanistan, but this is a new departure."*

Cameron was lying.

Reprive told The Intercept that this was *"yet another example of the unacceptable level of secrecy that surrounds U.K. involvement in the U.S. 'targeted killing' program."*

Chris Cole of [Drone Wars UK](#) told TruePublica *"Time and again the government has argued in public that there is clear blue water between British intelligence gathering and and the US use of drones for extra-judicial targeted killing. With the British now directly engaging in such operations in Syria and these latest revelations coming out about Menwith Hill, its clear that the UK has in fact been operating hand-in-glove with the US on drone killing for years."*

The British government's Ministry of Defence, which handles media inquires related to Menwith Hill, declined to comment.

As for Menwith Hill, you might be wondering exactly what it is that is being monitored. The Intercept says via NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, Menwith Hill has two main spying capabilities. *"The first uses powerful antennae contained within the golf ball-like domes to eavesdrop on communications as they are being beamed between foreign satellites. The second uses U.S. government satellites to locate and monitor wireless communications on the ground below — such as cellphone calls and even WiFi traffic."*

The issue to the largely apathetic citizens of Britain is that the U.S. and U.K. governments have actively misled the public for years through a "cover story" at this facility.



Demonstrators gathered at Menwith Hill to protest against the vastly increased use of 'drones'- as information is leaked about its activities

Menwith Hill can target the communications of anything from "tactical military, scientific,

political, and economic communications signals.” Basically anything of interest.

The full story on The Intercept graphically describes Britain’s contribution to kill/capture operations that date back years, way before the Snowden revelations of 2013. It lays out the truly astonishing capabilities of British and American technology to infiltrate satellite and internet data anywhere in the world, no matter how remote.

Reprive went on to say *“We were palmed off with platitudes and reassured that any U.S. activities on or involving British bases were fully compliant with domestic and international legal provisions. It now appears that this was far from the truth.”*

Irrespective of the rights and wrongs of killing suspected terrorists in internet cafe’s in a desert region somewhere in the Middle East, Britain could have violated international treaties that the U.K. still remains bound to.

Once we have a situation where the rule of law is declared null and void by a shadowy government agency acting without accountability, where does that end? In Britain, we have already seen the original Terrorism Act specifically designed to apprehend dangerous extremists, used to capture those not paying their TV licences.

In ten years time will the ‘kill/capture’ programme at Menwith Hill be extended to UK criminals, and who decides the sentence? In the case of Menwith Hill, the job of the British judiciary has been covertly retired. Politics and not the courts have now become the masters of our British law system that was constructed over the centuries. English law is renowned as being the mother of the common law and has been so since since 1189. Not so today, as it appears the British people have already acquiesced to an autocratic regime who are blatantly abusing an existing legal system that generations before them fought so hard for.

Extracts from The Intercept story was published with kind permission of the author Ryan Gallagher. Read the full story of Menwith Hill [HERE](#).

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