



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 8, 2015

British Kill U.K. Citizen in Syria in Drone Strike

Speaking before Parliament's House of Commons on September 7, British Prime Minister David Cameron responded to a question posed by Kevin Brennan (MP for Cardiff West in Wales) about the killing of his former constituent, Reyaad Khan, by a British drone strike in Syria. Cameron answered, in part:



Today, I can inform the House that in an act of self-defense and after meticulous planning, Reyaad Khan was killed in a precision airstrike carried out on 21 August by an RAF remotely piloted aircraft [drone] while he was traveling in a vehicle in the area of Raqqa in Syria. In addition to Reyaad Khan, who was the target of the strike, two ISIL associates were also killed, one of whom, Ruhul Amin, has been identified as a UK national. They were ISIL fighters, and I can confirm that there were no civilian casualties.

Cameron defended his government's decision to wage the drone strike against a British citizen without due process by stating: "I am clear that the action we took was entirely lawful. The Attorney General was consulted and was clear that there would be a clear legal basis for action in international law."

In today's United Kingdom, apparently, international law trumps centuries of British tradition going back to the Magna Carta in 1215, which stated: "No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land."

Unfortunately for British citizens, however, modern British law has lost that principle expressed in the Magna Carta and is not nearly so explicit as the U.S. Constitution when it comes to guaranteeing due process of the law.

Cameron further defended the decision to kill by stating:

We were exercising the UK's inherent right to self-defense. There was clear evidence of these individuals planning and directing armed attacks against the UK. These were part of a series of actual and foiled attempts to attack the UK and our allies, and given the prevailing circumstances in Syria, the airstrike was the only feasible means of effectively disrupting the attacks that had been planned and directed.

Cameron said the decision to implement the drone strike was made at a meeting he held with "the most



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senior members of the National Security Council” and Jeremy Wright, Britain’s attorney general. After Wright confirmed “there was a legal basis for action,” Britain’s defense secretary, Michael Fallon, authorized the operation.

The prime minister also emphasized that he wanted to be clear that the strike was not part of coalition military action against ISIS in Syria, but was “a targeted strike to deal with a clear, credible and specific terrorist threat to [the U.K.] at home.”

Cameron went on to state that he believes there is a strong case for the U.K. to take part in airstrikes as part of the international coalition to target ISIS in Syria and Iraq, but that his government will return to the House of Commons “for a separate vote if we propose to join coalition strikes in Syria.”

American law is much more explicit than British law when it comes to safeguarding the rights of U.S. citizens, wherever they may reside, against attacks against their lives or liberty without due process of law. The original concept of due process articulated in the Magna Carta in 1215 was expanded upon when the historic document was amended in 1354 (“No man of what state or condition he be, shall be put out of his lands or tenements nor taken, nor disinherited, nor put to death, without he be brought to answer by due process of law”), and it was preserved in the U.S. Constitution, even as it has withered away in the United Kingdom.

This principle was safeguarded very early in our history, when the Fifth Amendment, ratified in 1789, stated in part: “No person shall ... be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.”

President Obama appeared to be cognizant of this constitutional requirement when, in an interview with CNN’s chief White House correspondent Jessica Yellin in July 2012, he listed five criteria he used in determining whether he would authorize a drone strike against “militants.” Criteria number five was: “That while there is a legal justification for us to try and stop [American citizens] from carrying out plots ... they are subject to the protections of the Constitution and due process.”

Despite these assurances, Obama has already authorized a fatal drone strike against a U.S. citizen, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, a Colorado native who was killed in October 2011. On the day of the attack by Hellfire missiles launched from an American Predator drone, 16-year-old al-Awlaki, who was the target of the attack, was having a roadside picnic in Yemen with a few second cousins and their friends — most of whom he had never met before that day.

In “[Attack of the Drones](#),” an article published in *The New American*’s print edition in 2012, writer Joe Wolverton noted:

Abdulrahman al-Awlaki was killed in October 2011, and to date the Obama administration has never informed the country of any wrongdoing by this teenager, other than being related to a man (his father) who posted on the Internet anti-American videos that allegedly influenced others to commit crimes. A government-sanctioned assassination of such an individual is repugnant to all those who cherish life, liberty, and the due process that protects them....

Finally, with regard to civilian casualties, not even the White House claims that ... al-Awlaki was a member of al-Qaeda or any associated group believed to pose a threat to the United States. He was quite literally killed for being associated with one who was allegedly associated with those allegedly associated with al-Qaeda.

In 2011, when he was running for president, former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) condemned the drone attack on al-Awlaki, stating, in part:



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I don't think that's a good way to deal with our problems. Al-Awlaki was born here; he is an American citizen. He was never tried or charged for any crimes. No one knows if he killed anybody.... If the American people accept this blindly and casually that we now have an accepted practice of the president assassinating people who he thinks are bad guys, I think it's sad....

To start assassinating American citizens without charges, we should think very seriously about this.

In view of the fatal U.S. drone attack on al-Awlaki, it should surprise no one that the British have emulated our lack of discretion. If the Fifth Amendment to our Constitution has not prevented the Obama administration from executing Americans in disregard for due process, what prevents the British — who enjoy no similar protections — from doing likewise?

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