

Deprivation of Citizenship and the Targeted Killing of Britons

Chris Woods, Bureau of Investigative Journalism

Background

The London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism is a key source of data and investigations regarding the targeted killing campaigns of the United States, most often carried out by armed drones. The Bureau publishes and maintains extensive and evolving databases on US drone strikes in [Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia](#) which cover more than 1,000 violent incidents since 2002. In addition, it has published data on UK and US drone strikes in conventional conflicts including [Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq](#). The Bureau also conducts major field investigations into aspects of the covert US war on terror. In summer 2011, for example, it [directly challenged](#) Barack Obama's chief counter-terrorism adviser John Brennan, who had claimed that CIA drones in Pakistan were no longer killing 'non-combatants.' In February 2012 the Bureau also conclusively demonstrated, in an investigation for the Sunday Times, that the CIA had [deliberately targeted rescuers and funeral-goers](#) in Pakistan. A UN team is presently investigating such incidents as [possible war crimes](#).

Deprivation of citizenship and drone strikes

As part of a major investigation in collaboration with The Independent, the Bureau has to date identified [23 people stripped of their British citizenship since 2006](#), 18 of them under the Coalition. Of these, at least five were born in the UK - the first known occasion in modern history when British-born people have been stripped of their nationalities.

Bilal al-Berjawi was a Lebanese-born man with alleged links to Al Qaeda who was killed by the US on its second attempt in January 2012. Berjawi had his UK dual-citizenship [stripped by the Home Secretary](#) in autumn 2010.

The Bureau also discovered that Mohamed Sakr, British-born of [Egyptian parents](#), lost his UK citizenship at the same time as Berjawi (a childhood friend) and was also killed by the United States, in February 2012.

While the Bureau has yet to identify any direct link between the removal of citizenship and the subsequent killings of Berjawi and Sakr, recent [claims have emerged](#) that the UK supplies intelligence to the US which may be used in lethal drone strikes outside the battlefield. This contrasts sharply with Germany, for example, where the supply of intelligence to the US which might lead to the deaths of citizens is explicitly banned.

In August 2012 a third ex-British man, Mahdi Hashi, was seized and secretly detained in Djibouti. He was interrogated by the FBI along with two captured Swedish citizens, before all three were [renditioned to New York](#) and [secretly held in the US penal system](#) for five weeks. The Bureau has obtained evidence showing that Sweden's police service appears to have co-operated closely with the US, ending its own investigation into the two Swedes on the day of their arrest and clearing the way for their subsequent rendition. On this occasion there were only six weeks between Hashi's British citizenship being stripped and his seizure in Djibouti.

The Killing of other Britons

While Berjawi and Sakr are the only known 'ex-Britons' killed by the United States in its covert war on terror, the Bureau has so far identified an additional 13 to 15 UK citizens killed in covert US airstrikes - mainly by drones - outside the regular battlefield since 2007. The first reported UK deaths took place in January 2007 in Somalia; while the first UK drone death in Pakistan took place in November 2008. Indeed, the UK presently represents the highest number of Western citizens reported killed in US covert strikes (followed by Germany and the US with around six each.)