

Cameron's botched Libya intervention blamed for rise of ISIS

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David Cameron was 'ultimately responsible' for the failure of the 2011 Libya bombing campaign, according to the inquiry.

An "opportunistic" David Cameron led a botched intervention in Libya that caused the rise of Islamic State in North Africa, a British parliamentary inquiry has concluded.

The former British prime minister was "ultimately responsible" for the failure of the 2011 bombing campaign, according to the foreign affairs committee.

He relied on poor intelligence as he allowed an operation designed to protect civilians to "drift" into a campaign to remove dictator Muammar Gaddafi, the report said. It was published two days after Mr Cameron surprised Westminster by standing down as an MP.

Britain and France led airstrikes on Libya after an uprising triggered by the Arab Spring. The threat of further violence by Gaddafi spurred Western powers to take action but since then thousands of people have been killed and unrest continues.

The report into the conflict said the chief of the defence staff at the time, General David Richards, "disassociated himself" from the government's claim that the operation was in the national interest.

It accuses Mr Cameron of backing regime change without a coherent strategy for the country after the removal of Gaddafi.

"By the summer of 2011, the limited intervention to protect civilians had drifted into an - opportunist policy of regime change. That policy was not underpinned by a strategy to support and shape post-Gaddafi Libya," it said.

"The result was political and economic collapse, inter-militia and inter-tribal warfare, humanitarian and migrant crises, widespread human rights violations, the spread of Gaddafi regime weapons across the region and the growth of (Islamic State) in North Africa."

The MPs added: "Through his decision-making ... David Cameron was ultimately responsible for the failure to develop a coherent Libya strategy."

The criticism echoes remarks by US President Barack Obama this year that Britain and France had not done enough to "follow up" after the conflict.

The MPs' 49-page report on Libya also found that Britain:

- Failed to identify that Islamist extremists were among rebels supported by RAF warplanes and special forces.
- Failed to see that the threat to civilians posed by Gaddafi was "overstated".

- Failed to encourage France to heed a military plan to pause airstrikes and attempt diplomacy once Benghazi, Libya's second city, had been saved.
- Missed an opportunity to exploit relations between former British prime minister Tony Blair and Gaddafi, which could have resulted in the dictator handing over power.
- Drew up post-conflict plans to stabilise Libya that were not based on reality, with one minister describing them as "fanciful rot".
- Failed to secure weapons and ammunition worth billions of dollars after the collapse of the regime that "increased terrorism" across the region.

The foreign affairs committee, made up of six Tory MPs, four from Labour and one from the SNP, accused the government of failing to carry out a proper analysis of the people behind the Libyan uprising. "It may be that the UK government was unable to analyse the nature of the rebellion in Libya due to incomplete intelligence and insufficient institutional insight and that it was caught up in events as they developed," the report said.

"It could not verify the actual threat to civilians posed by the Gaddafi regime; it selectively took elements of Muammar Gaddafi's rhetoric at face value; and it failed to identify the militant Islamist extremist element in the rebellion.

"UK strategy was founded on erroneous assumptions and an incomplete understanding of the evidence."

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