



House of Commons  
Defence Committee

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**UK military operations  
in Syria and Iraq:  
Government Response  
to the Committee's  
Second Report**

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**Seventh Special Report of Session  
2016–17**

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## The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies

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### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are James Davies (Clerk), Dr Adam Evans (Second Clerk), John Curtis, Ian Thomson, Eleanor Scarnell, and David Nicholas (Committee Specialists), David Gardner (Senior Committee Assistant), Carolyn Bowes (Committee Assistant).

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# Seventh Special Report

The Defence Committee published its Second Report of Session 2016–17, on [UK military operations in Syria and Iraq](#) (HC 106) on 21 September 2016. The Government’s response was received on 1 February 2017 and is appended to this report.

## Appendix: Government Response

The Government welcomes the House of Commons Defence Committee’s inquiry ‘UK military operations in Syria and Iraq’ and the findings set out in the Committee’s report (HC 106), published on 21 September 2016. We welcome the Committee’s view that UK personnel have played a significant role in tackling Daesh as part of the 67-strong Global Coalition. We have conducted more than 1,100 airstrikes across Iraq and Syria – second only to the US. We have helped train more than 30,000 Iraqi security forces – but we recognise that Daesh cannot be defeated by military means alone: this is why we have a comprehensive cross-government strategy to support the Iraqi government deliver reforms and promote a political settlement in Syria.

Our formal response to the Committee’s recommendations and conclusions is set out below. The Committee’s headings and findings are highlighted in bold and italics, with the Government’s response set out in plain text.

1. ***Global terrorism trends indicate that, as in the case of al-Qaeda previously, pre-existing Islamist organisations will attach themselves to whichever militant network appears to be in the ascendant at any given time.*** (Paragraph 30)

The Government notes the Committee’s reference to global terrorism trends and agrees that pre-existing Islamic organisations may attach themselves to whichever militant networks are perceived to be in the ascendant.

2. ***The UK and Coalition’s strategy to counter DAESH is predominately focused on Iraq and Syria; and relies on the removal of territory from DAESH in order to eliminate it. That is a necessary, but not sufficient, strategy. If DAESH transforms itself into an international movement or a network of affiliates—like al-Qaeda before it—which can survive the loss of territory, the UK Government approach will need to adapt. For example, if DAESH is defeated in the Middle East but then grows strong in Africa, the current strategy will require major revision.*** (Paragraph 31)

The Government agrees that the UK and Global Coalition strategy to defeat Daesh and its affiliates needs to remain adaptable. The progress of the Counter-Daesh campaign as a whole is reviewed regularly by Coalition ministers to ensure that it takes account of developments, as is set out below.

3. ***We recommend that the Government should set out how the strategy will be flexible enough to cope with the various possible outcomes, and should explain what the differing options are. If the military action is successful but the overall strategy does not adapt, then DAESH will continue to pose a threat to stability and safety across the region and, indeed, much more widely.*** (Paragraph 32)

The Government's Strategy aims to defeat Daesh and its ideology, in a way which minimises the threat to UK security and UK interests overseas. The UK strategy has 3 pillars:

- Pillar 1 supports efforts to disrupt threats to UK mainland and interests by delivering the UK's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST);
- Pillar 2 drives action to strategically defeat Daesh as an organisation; and
- Pillar 3 includes works to stabilise the region. This includes efforts to contain and prevent the spread of Daesh beyond Iraq and Syria as well as those intended to maintain Coalition cohesion and boost regional participation in the Coalition.

The strategy is effects-based and draws on multiple lines of effort:

- Defeating Daesh militarily;
- Disrupting Daesh's finances;
- Exposing Daesh's true nature;
- Disrupting the flow of foreign fighters and protecting the homeland; and
- Providing stabilisation and humanitarian support.

Each line of effort in the UK's counter Daesh strategy has a nominated Director-level Senior Risk Owner who is responsible for driving delivery and ensuring accountability for their specific line of effort.

As Daesh loses territory in Iraq and Syria, we are actively looking at how the threat from Daesh will evolve. We expect that foreign terrorist fighters will try to return either to their home countries, or will look to disperse around the region and beyond. We are working across Whitehall and with our Coalition partners to identify how we can best mitigate this threat. An initiative led by Chiefs of Defence from partner nations is also being developed to coordinate bilateral and multilateral military efforts.

***4. At present the UK has as its primary focus the defeat of DAESH in Iraq. However, the rapid increase in DAESH-affiliated groups elsewhere should be a cause for grave concern, particularly where there are strong links between the DAESH leadership in Iraq and Syria and those groups. The danger posed by the majority of these DAESH-affiliated groups may be minimal at present, but the evidence presented to us suggests that, if unchecked, they could form yet another front in the battle against international Islamist terrorism. The International Community needs to work together to provide a holistic approach to counter violent Islamic extremism through improving education, governance and infrastructure in areas at risk as well as countering the funding and export of extreme Islamic views. This should be parallel and complimentary to any military action.*** (Paragraph 33)

The Government agrees with the Committee that the international community needs to work together to provide a holistic response to counter violent Islamic extremism and that this should be parallel and complementary to the military action, which itself is only a

part of the Global Coalition’s strategy. The UK continues to seek further ways of working with others to strengthen the resilience of partner nations against Daesh affiliate groups, as described below.

**5. *We recommend that, as part of an explanation of how it is countering the global threat from DAESH, the Government should provide more details of the military and capacity-building operations which are being undertaken to counter the DAESH affiliates.*** (Paragraph 34)

Defeating Daesh in Iraq and Syria is the current priority because that represents the immediate threat. But the Government is also taking active steps to tackle Daesh branches and affiliates across the wider region. We are building on existing military relationships to contain Daesh’s threat by strengthening global allies and partners. We are committed to a programme of assistance, targeting military efforts where they can best protect UK national interests from the threat of Daesh branches and affiliates. Some examples are as follows:

In Libya, we have deployed UK military advisers to work with the Government of National Accord to develop a comprehensive approach to defeating Daesh in Libya and help them to prevent Daesh from using Libya as a base from which to plan and carry out attacks. We are also in the process of training the Libyan Coast Guard to assist Libya in strengthening its maritime border.

The UK deployed a Short Term Training Team to Tunisia in June 2016 to provide three specialist training courses to the Tunisia National Guard Commando to help them deal with internal and external threats. The month-long training focused on medical training, small boat handling and security operations training and has created a cadre of instructors to further cascade training within the National Guard.

The UK is providing a substantial and increasing package of intelligence, military and development support to help Nigeria fight terrorism and improve security and stability in the Lake Chad Basin. This includes training and advice for Nigerian troops and £5 million to support the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram. A resident British Military Advisory and Training Team has coordinated the delivery of training to more than 10,000 Nigerian military personnel in a broad range of disciplines.

While the Taliban remain the primary threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) have also been fighting a Daesh affiliate in the east of the country. British troops are enhancing the capabilities of the ANDSF through mentoring instructors at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA), advising ministers and senior officials in the Afghan Security Ministries and providing mentors for the Afghan Air Force.

Although there is no Daesh affiliate in Jordan, the UK has increased its defence capacity building programme considerably, because we wish to assist the Jordanians in strengthening their resilience. We have led the multinational development of a Quick Reaction Force, which offers Jordan’s

best prospect of deploying rapidly to deter incursions on its borders. We have also delivered a full spectrum of Short Term Training Teams, aimed at building the operational capacity of the Jordanian Army and Air Force. Most recently, we have provided direct assistance in enhancing border security as Daesh's ability to destabilise Jordan has increased.

**6. *It is disappointing that the MoD has been unable to provide us with the full statistical analysis of UK airstrikes in Syria which we requested. Their inability to do so for understandable reasons, nonetheless may tend to undermine the Government's assertion that the bombing campaign in Syria is in support of credible moderate ground forces (apart from the Kurds) which was one of the key elements of its argument for extending the UK's campaign against DAESH to that country.*** (Paragraph 74)

The Government notes the Committee's recognition of the MoD's position on the statistical analysis of UK airstrikes and of the reasons underlying it, together with the Committee's view on the possible effects.

**7. *If the Government is to continue to justify and validate its policy of airstrikes in Syria, it should provide the necessary detail on what is being targeted. We therefore recommend that the MoD put this information, as far as possible, into the public domain so that realistic judgements on the effectiveness of the UK's air operations in Syria can be made. At the very least, Government ministers ought to be made aware of such figures.*** (Paragraph 75)

The RAF plays a significant role as part of the Coalition air campaign in Iraq and Syria. To date the RAF has undertaken over 1,100 strikes targeting Daesh infrastructure, Daesh fighter positions, Daesh vehicles (including vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (IEDs)), weapons emplacements, weapons caches, and IEDs. A full breakdown of the RAF strikes was provided to the Committee. In addition, since the start of Operation SHADER, the MOD has consistently published regular updates, via the gov.uk website, detailing each and every individual target struck by RAF assets. This represents the release of an unprecedented level of detail; it goes far beyond what MOD has released in relation to previous military operations. It is worth noting that commentators have observed that these statements maintain the highest level of transparency amongst coalition partners.

**8. *In Iraq it is clear that air operations have been effective in reclaiming territory, despite the adaptation of DAESH tactics to counter that threat. This is because of their role in supporting identifiable local ground forces which are able to take and hold territory. The air operation in Syria is much smaller mainly because of a lack of partners on the ground, other than Kurdish forces, which can benefit from that support.*** (Paragraph 76)

The Government acknowledges the view of the Committee that there is a lack of partners on the ground in Syria. However, the Government's view remains that there are significant numbers of non-extremist fighters in Syria opposing both the Assad regime and terrorist groups like Daesh.

**9. *Also in Iraq, the UK training effort appears to be both effective and substantial. Over a third of troops trained by the Coalition have received this training from UK military personnel. The expansion of training offered by UK troops means that the UK now has a presence at all of the Iraqi training bases. In the gifting of equipment, the***



***length of time that it has taken for the UK Government to re-supply Peshmerga forces with ammunition for machine-guns it previously supplied, is of great concern. We recommend that, in future, the Government should ensure that its support to allies and partners is more consistent and timely.*** (Paragraph 77)

The UK Government has provided substantial training and support to the Peshmerga recognising their vital role in the military campaign to counter Daesh. Gifting to the Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government is coordinated through the Global Coalition to ensure that requests can be directed to those nations best able to meet them. So far, the UK has provided the Peshmerga with over 50 tonnes of non-lethal support, 40 heavy machine guns, more than a million rounds of ammunition and £600,000 worth of military equipment, and to date we have trained over 6,900 Peshmerga in infantry tactics and counter-IED expertise, medical and engineering skills. Gifted items from the UK and other nations have been delivered using spare capacity on UK aircraft to provide value for money to the taxpayer while ensuring that it meets Peshmerga needs. Owing to the demand for UK strategic air transport, the need to maximise the capacity of aircraft and the limited number of aircraft, this spare capacity is not always readily available, but it is programmed by the RAF and in cooperation with our Coalition partners as soon as it is possible.

***10. We recommend that the Government should provide an assessment of how long it took the UK to get to the position where it was operating at strength within the Coalition and how long it can maintain that position.*** (Paragraph 78)

The campaign against Daesh began in June 2014 with the establishment of the US operation Inherent Resolve, and subsequently the joining of 68 members into a Global Coalition under the US leadership. The UK was one of the first nations to respond; in September 2014 we began RAF airstrikes as part of the Coalition air campaign in Iraq, and deployed trainers to the Kurdish region of Iraq. We have continued to play a full and leading role in the Coalition, extending airstrikes into Syria in December 2015, and the UK has responded positively and quickly to Coalition requests for further support to the campaign.

The UK commitment to Operation SHADER has been delivered in accordance with the development of the UK's wider counter-Daesh strategy cross-Government and so as to meet the evolving needs of both the Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces. The tempo of this support can be maintained for as long as is required by the Government of Iraq.

***11. We also recommend that the Government should provide clarification on the training of Syrian opposition fighters including the number of individuals it has trained, the number of UK military personnel currently engaged with such training, and most importantly the identity of the groups to which the trainees belonged.*** (Paragraph 79)

The UK participated last year in the original US-led Train and Equip (T&E) programme, designed to train members of the Vetted Syrian Opposition to fight Daesh at locations outside Syria. That programme was suspended on 6 October 2015, because smaller numbers than expected were completing the training. A refined US T&E programme was approved in July 2016, and on 25 October 2016 the UK announced it would re-join the

programme. Up to 20 UK personnel will assist in the delivery of training including basic infantry tactics, command and control, explosive hazard awareness training and medical training.

As has been explained previously, it would be prejudicial to the groups themselves to identify them directly.

**12. *It is clear that the UK is part of an International Coalition and that the strategy of that Coalition is subject to revision by those involved. However, the reasons for such revisions and the resultant changes in the UK effort ought to be explained. Whilst the discussion, for instance, about modifying the train-and-equip programme in Syria may have taken place in the United States, the UK Government has failed to set out why changes have been made and what impact they have had on UK personnel or those they have been training. The publication of information concerning the UK's military effort, whilst greater than in some previous operations, ought to demonstrate how UK military actions are supporting the wider strategy.*** (Paragraph 80)

The Government notes the Committee's position. As the Committee acknowledges, in terms of the publication of information about our operations, and compared to previous operations, the Government has provided a significant amount of data on the gov.uk website, including on the political and humanitarian situation in Iraq and Syria, and on UK Government responses to events there. The Government has also made regular statements to Parliament and provided briefing for MPs and for the media, both of which put our military effort into the context of the UK and Coalition counter-Daesh strategy. The Government will, however, continue to look for opportunities to update and explain the development of the campaign.

The UK's participation in the US-led Syria T&E programme was originally announced by the then Foreign Secretary in the House on 16 October 2014 (Official Report, column 470), and confirmed by the Defence Secretary in a Written Ministerial Statement on 20 July 2015 (Official Report, column 173WS). The programme was suspended by the United States in October 2015 having only trained a limited number of Vetted Syrian Opposition but the length of the suspension was, at that stage, unclear. The UK decision to participate in the restarted programme was announced on the website www.gov.uk on 25 October 2016.

**13. *The Government's case for extending UK military operations to Syria was based on a strategy of supporting the 70,000 moderate opposition forces identified by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron. We have sought to test this figure in terms of both numbers and orientation. We understand why the Government have been unable to provide a list of the groups, since that would risk providing useful intelligence to the Assad regime. However, we have relied upon outside organisations who have published such lists and most, if not all, the individual groups have as a result, already been identified. That information is in the public domain which means that the groups will already be known to the Assad regime.*** (Paragraph 105)

The Government notes that the Committee has received information from open sources identifying moderate opposition forces in Syria. However, it would not be appropriate for the Government to release or confirm such information on individual groups in Syria.



**14. As with the DAESH affiliates, the threat posed by Jabhat al-Nusra must be monitored by the Government. The danger posed by an organisation which has been one of al-Qaeda’s most successful affiliates may well be limited to Syria at present but the potential for it to carry out terrorist attacks globally may increasingly become a reality. Its recent rebranding and formal separation from al-Qaeda, may increase its influence over other elements of Islamist armed opposition in Syria, narrowing the political options for the future still further.** (Paragraph 113)

The Government notes the Committee’s view of the threat posed by Jabhat-al-Nusra, which has now changed its name to become Jabhat-Fatah al-Sham (JFS). This threat will continue to be monitored by our counter-terrorist experts.

**15. We recommend that the Government should set out how it is monitoring the threat posed by Jabhat al-Nusra/Jabhat Fatah al-Sham and how it intends to counter that threat.** (Paragraph 114)

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham poses a terrorism threat to the UK; while they are primarily Syria focused they follow AQ’s ideology, share its vision of global jihad and likely share its long-term intent to attack the West.

The Joint International Counter Terrorism Unit and the FCO Syria Desk own a cross-Whitehall action plan which captures the various lines of effort we are taking to undermine and counter JFS in Syria. Oversight of the plan belongs to the Senior Responsible Officer for JFS, the Director General for the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism in the Home Office. The action plan focuses on four pillars:

- (1) Pursue: Pursue JFS leadership and degrade their capacity to conduct external attack planning
- (2) Weaken: Strip resources away from JFS and where possible isolate them from the wider opposition
- (3) Undermine: Undermine JFS’s credibility and community support base
- (4) Partners: Strengthen the international commitment to counter JFS.

**16. The Russians are a key actor in the Syrian theatre and, in the past six months, the Assad regime and its supporters have begun to tackle DAESH in its Syrian locations. Military cooperation with Russia may be the only way in which DAESH can finally be suppressed or defeated in Syria. However, active cooperation could take place only with the agreement of the International Coalition—including, as it does, some regional powers which are wholly opposed to the Assad regime.** (Paragraph 123)

The Government agrees with the Committee that Russia is a key player in Syria. However, Russia’s primary role to date has been to support the military campaign of the Assad regime. We are clear that the effect of this campaign has been to prolong the conflict and worsen the suffering of the Syrian people – not least in Aleppo. We call on Russia to use its influence to ensure that the regime complies with the ceasefire in place since 30 December 2016, and to enable political talks to resume about a sustainable political settlement. In the long term, the Government remains of the view that Daesh can only be defeated in Syria through a sustainable political settlement based on transition away from the Assad regime.

**17. *Two years into the military campaign to counter the threat from DAESH, we are seeing the impact of the UK effort in the International Coalition. Whilst the military effort in Iraq is bearing fruit, that is much less certain in Syria. We believe this is partly due to the aspirations of the UK Government in respect of each country. The goals in Iraq are to remove territory from DAESH, to strengthen the Iraqi Government and to maintain Iraq as a unitary state. The goals in Syria are not only to defeat DAESH, but also to help bring into being a Government which will be neither authoritarian and repressive, on the one hand, nor Islamist and extreme, on the other. These goals cannot be accomplished by military means alone. We discuss the wider strategy and the importance of the political aspect of the fight to counter DAESH in the next section.*** (Paragraph 126)

The Government notes the Committee's view of the relative success of the campaigns in Iraq and Syria. The military campaign in Syria, as in Iraq, is focused on the fight against Daesh consistent with the terms of the motion agreed by Parliament on 2 December 2015. While that campaign is making progress, the Government is clear that Daesh cannot be defeated in the long term in Syria without a political settlement which ends the conflict and establishes a Syrian government capable of uniting the country and combating terrorism. We believe the only way to end the Syrian conflict is a political settlement based on transition to a government representative of all Syrians and which will protect all Syrians' rights. This transition should be in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué, and the roadmap which was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2254. Syria's institutions need to be reformed, in order for a new government to meet the demands of the Syrian people and to be able to take the fight to Daesh.

**18. *The argument that it must be a local force—not a Western one—which takes and holds territory has been borne out by previous experiences of intervention. Such a strategy (western air power and local ground troops) is reliant on political progress alongside military achievement. Whilst the progress in the military campaign to counter DAESH is beginning to gain momentum, the same cannot be said for the progress of political reform. A lack of political reform in Iraq, let alone Syria, may well undermine the military progress to date, removing the threat of DAESH only for it to be replaced by other groups posing similar or even greater threats.*** (Paragraph 144)

The Government agrees with the Committee that military achievements will not be sufficient in the longer term without accompanying political progress in both Syria and Iraq. The Government's position on Syria is set out elsewhere in this response. In Iraq, we consider an Iraqi-led political plan for the post-liberation period is critical to avoid a re-emergence of Daesh in a different form. This has been a priority over the past year for UK's engagement with Iraq. We have worked closely with our Coalition partners to marry political progress with military success. For example, we have been working with the Government of Iraq and our Coalition partners to explore political processes within which key legitimate political actors, representative of Iraq's diversity, might come together to steer stabilisation efforts, in particular in Mosul. As operations progress, the need for such processes is likely to grow. We will continue to urge the Iraqi authorities to prioritise political reform and reconciliation. And while the UK will continue to strongly support the Government of Iraq as it does so, ultimately the future of Iraq is for Iraqis to decide. If solutions are to last, they must be Iraqi-owned.

**19. *The Government must set out exactly how it intends to help ensure that political reform is achieved and what action it is planning to take to keep it in step with the military campaign.*** (Paragraph 145)

We continue to believe that the only long-term solution to the threats posed by instability in Syria, including terrorism and migration challenges, is a lasting political settlement based on transition away from the Assad regime. We hope that the ceasefire announced by Russia, Turkey and Iran on 29 December 2016 will create a constructive climate for the resumption of political talks between the regime and the opposition under the auspices of the United Nations. The UN Special Envoy for Syria has announced plans to reconvene the parties in Geneva in February 2017. We have called on all parties to fully implement the ceasefire and for the guarantors to effectively monitor the ceasefire and use their influence to stem violations. We will use our position in the UN Security Council and International Syria Support Group to support the UN-mediated negotiations.

Looking further ahead, the UK has played a crucial role in pushing forward thinking on how a political transition can come about. In September 2016 the Foreign Secretary hosted the Syrian opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC) in London. The HNC is the broadest-based Syrian opposition Coalition seen so far. They set out a constructive and detailed vision for how to bring about political transition in a way that protects the interests of all components of Syrian society and – whilst enabling the country to move beyond Assad’s tyranny – also ensures that the key structures and institutions of state are preserved. We believe this vision is a valuable contribution to the political process.

We are working with the Government of Iraq to ensure political progress goes hand-in-hand with military success, and deals with the underlying factors that led to Daesh’s rise in the first place. We will continue to support Prime Minister Abadi and the Government of Iraq in its efforts to deliver the reforms and reconciliation needed to rebuild public trust in the Iraqi state and unite all Iraqis against extremism.

**20. *The long-term strategy articulated by the Secretary of State—a stable, secure, democratic Middle East—is laudable, but it remains to be seen how the Government expects to achieve this. It is far from clear that the forces unleashed in the Arab uprisings are capable of transition, at this stage of societal development, into the sort of pluralist and tolerant democratic systems that conform to Western ideals. We recommend that the Government should deliver on its undertaking to develop a realistic strategy for the Gulf and should set out how it intends to work with partners, allies and international organisations to promote stability in the Middle East.*** (Paragraph 149)

The National Security Council (NSC) agreed a Gulf Strategy on 7 July 2015 to protect and promote the UK’s interests in the six Gulf Cooperation Council states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and recognising the importance of these in addressing direct threats to the UK from terrorism, extremism and organised crime, for our energy security and for wider regional stability. The NSC Gulf Strategy is delivered through increased and integrated cross-Government engagement and activity, including working with partners, allies and international organisations. The Strategy is supported by an integrated fund, which enables Departments to be agile in programming supporting activity. Meeting the commitment set out in the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), delivery of the Strategy is coordinated by a dedicated joint unit hosted by the Cabinet Office, which stood up in November 2015.

Aligned with this strategy, the MOD plays a leading role in promoting regional security and stability, not least by its contribution to multinational forces engaged against Daesh, in deterring aggression or in combating transnational crime in the Gulf and beyond. Reflecting our long-term security commitment to the region, MOD is establishing its defence presence on a permanent footing, including by the commission of HMS JUFAIR in Bahrain and Air Component Command in Qatar. We are working more often and more closely to build the capability of Gulf States' security forces, promoting our high standards of operational effectiveness and conduct.

**21. *There are legitimate concerns that have been raised about the overall strategy to counter DAESH. There is potential for DAESH to be defeated territorially only for them (or another group) to continue to pose a threat to stability in the Middle East and the West in general. The importance of stability in the Middle East is clear. If the International Coalition (and therefore the UK) finds itself reduced to a binary choice between an Assad-style dictatorship or a revolutionary Islamist alternative, there will need to be a hard-headed evaluation of which of the unpalatable prospects poses the lesser threat to our national interests.*** (Paragraph 150)

The Government notes the Committee's view of the choices facing the international Coalition. The atrocities the Assad regime has committed have served to fuel rather than quell terrorism and radicalisation and make it impossible for Assad to unite the country and bring peace to Syria. Millions of Syrians will remain unwilling to accept the dominance of a tyrant who has the blood of hundreds of thousands on his hands. His military dependence on foreign militias has also served to further inflame sectarian divides inside Syria and across the region, and has emboldened other extremist actors that intend to threaten the UK and its interests. We are clear that the Syrian crisis will endure until there is a genuine political settlement. Syria needs a transition to a new government, which is able to meet the needs of the Syrian people, and with which the international community could cooperate fully in the fight against Daesh, as we do with the Government of Iraq.

**22. *It is clear that recent interventions have required much more than mere military campaigns. There have been criticisms of levels of engagement in the political sphere in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria too. It is also clear that there is no single formula for success but that understanding the local political and cultural context, as well as the nature of the situation on the ground, is absolutely essential. We welcome the emergence of a new doctrine that extends thinking about intervention to include other actors such as aid agencies, NGOs and the private sector. The 'whole-of-Government' approach, epitomised by the National Security Council, is clearly an improvement on the management of previous interventions. However, despite that innovation, a number of concerns have been raised about interventions that have taken place since the National Security Council was created. This indicates that there are still flaws and weaknesses in the system. Some of these were identified in our predecessor Committee's Report (HC 682) on 'Decision-making in Defence Policy', published in March 2015.*** (Paragraph 158)

The NSC was created to deal with such challenges, understand and respond to matters of national security and bring together Whitehall Departments to take collective decisions. It fosters debate, with ministers and senior officials discussing and challenging policy options. It also brings experts together with Ministers, including the Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee, the Chief of the Defence Staff (representing the collective views

of the Chiefs of the Armed Services) and the heads of the intelligence agencies. The NSC addresses a broad range of national security topics and regular meetings allow Ministers to build up knowledge of complex issues over successive discussions. The Prime Minister and the National Security Adviser keep the function of the NSC under constant review and have considered how the mechanism could be improved in light of the lessons identified by the Iraq Inquiry and by Sir Peter Ricketts' review, which considered the function of the NSC during the Libya campaign.

We have incentivised integrated working across Government, including with our Armed Services, through single cross-Whitehall country, regional and thematic national security strategies, delivered in-country by integrated 'one Government' diplomatic missions. We have increased pooled funding such as the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), and set up joint units to provide an integrated approach to tackle international security issues, such as terrorism and counter-proliferation. We are making progress on our 2015 SDSR commitment to develop a virtual National Security Academy to support more collaborative and integrated working.

The make-up and structure of the NSC's sub-committees have been adjusted to ensure appropriate oversight is given to the most important issues facing Britain's national security by all relevant Ministers and experts. The terms of reference of the NSC and its sub-committees and the committees' agendas are regularly reviewed to ensure the NSC is focused on the most significant challenges. An important responsibility of the National Security Adviser is to ensure that the NSC acts as an effective body for overseeing Government policy on national security issues.

***23. The fact that witnesses repeatedly identified reactionary politics as a drag on overall outcomes, points to a pessimistic conclusion—that countries riven by intense tribal and religious divisions may take a very long time indeed to accept the basic principles of democracy and equal rights. If so, no amount of injected international aid will significantly accelerate the adoption of democratic norms and values as the basis of their political systems. (Paragraph 163)***

In Syria, the protracted and violent nature of the conflict and the activities of external actors such as Shia militia and Al-Qaida are leading to sharper sectarian and political divides. We continue to believe that it is in UK interests to build resilience against extremists and to support a negotiated political settlement leading to transition to an inclusive and representative government which protects the rights of its citizens. Our support for the opposition's High Negotiations Committee contributed to their development of a political vision which is based on democratic and inclusive principles. Our support for civil society in opposition-controlled areas has helped them to provide a credible alternative to extremists through their equitable governance and delivery of services. Our support for mediated dialogues, both for dispute resolution at the local level and for macro conflict resolution, is building understanding and common ground and laying the foundations of for a more peaceful, representative and inclusive future for Syria.

We are realistic about what UK aid funding can achieve in Iraq, recognising that the ongoing conflict and contested political situation means that achieving lasting change will be challenging. The Department for International Development's portfolio in Iraq is



focused on responding to the effects of conflict and building stability to prevent future conflict. Our support will help Iraq cope with the current crisis, whilst promoting longer term reform.

**24. *Stabilisation and reconstruction are central in the fight to counter DAESH, particularly in Iraq. We were impressed by both the calibre and the (relatively low) cost of the work carried out by the UNDP when we were in Iraq.*** (Paragraph 165)

The Government agrees with the Committee's assessment of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) work. The UK has provided over £15 million to support UN stabilisation programmes, including support for the UNDP Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilisation.

**25. *The disparity between military effort and that on stabilisation is concerning. Whilst stabilisation does not carry the same cost as a military operation, the low priority placed on stabilisation does not reassure us about Iraq's long-term future. We recommend that the Government ensures that the diplomatic and development effort relates more closely to the size of the military effort, whilst recognising that not all societies have reached a stage of development for fully-fledged democratic institutions to command general assent.*** (Paragraph 166)

In Syria, the UK is leading humanitarian efforts. We have pledged £2.3 billion, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis, making us the second biggest humanitarian donor in response to the Syrian crisis after the US. The UK is helping the Government of Iraq to stabilise areas liberated from Daesh and provide a safe environment for displaced people to return home.

We are working with the Government of Iraq to ensure political progress goes hand-in-hand with military success, and deals with the underlying factors that led to Daesh's rise in the first place. We will continue to support Prime Minister Abadi and the Government of Iraq in its efforts to deliver the reforms and reconciliation needed to rebuild public trust in the Iraqi state and unite all Iraqis against extremism. We believe that the only long-term solution to the threats posed by instability in Syria, including terrorism and migration challenges, is a lasting political settlement based on transition away from the Assad regime. To this end, we are working for a restoration of the Cessation of Hostilities in Syria to create the conditions under which political talks between the regime and the opposition can resume under the auspices of the United Nations. We will continue to play an active role in international discussions, including in the International Syria Support Group. We will also continue to work closely with our Coalition partners to ensure diplomatic efforts are brought to bear.

**26. *We shall, therefore consider holding a further inquiry, especially in the light of the Chilcot Report, which will look at the way the UK intervenes—the decision-making process, the preparation and planning both for the military campaign and its aftermath, and the way that the UK Government ensures that it can maintain a solid commitment to a strategy which is comprehensive and achievable. Only in this way can we be confident that lessons learnt from previous interventions are understood before any future ones are contemplated.*** (Paragraph 167)

The Government notes that the Committee intends to consider holding a further inquiry to look at the way that the UK intervenes, especially in the light of the Chilcot Report. The



Government is taking the conclusions and findings of the Chilcot Report very seriously and the Ministry of Defence established a small team to analyse the report in full. Their initial conclusions were that, while there is much in MOD's structures and processes that has changed and improved, there remain issues that need to be addressed, particularly around challenges in the policy-making process. Work continues to implement change as a result of the Chilcot Report, and the Defence Committee's conclusions from their Report and any future ones will be taken into account.