

Memorandum to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee

Prime Minister's Response to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's Second Report of Session 2015-16: The Extension of Offensive British Military Operations to Syria

November 2015

Introduction

Whether or not to use military force is one of the most significant decisions that any government takes. The need to do so most often arises because of a government's first duty: the responsibility to protect its citizens.

Decisions to use force are not to be taken lightly. It is right that Parliament, on behalf of the people, asks difficult questions and holds the Government to account. For its part, it is important that the Government should listen and learn. But it is also vital that the Government can act to keep this country safe.

Throughout Britain's history, we have been called on time and again to make the hardest of decisions in defence of our citizens and our country. Today one of the greatest threats we face to our security is the threat from ISIL.

We need a comprehensive response which seeks to deal with the threat that ISIL poses to us directly, not just through the measures we are taking at home, but by dealing with ISIL on the ground in the territory that it controls. It is in Raqqa, Syria, that ISIL has its headquarters, and it is from Raqqa that some of the main threats against this country are planned and orchestrated. We must tackle ISIL in Syria, as we are doing in neighbouring Iraq, in order to deal with the threat that ISIL poses to the region and to our security here at home. We have to deny a safe haven for ISIL in Syria. The longer ISIL is allowed to grow in Syria, the greater the threat it will pose. It is wrong for the United Kingdom to sub-contract its security to other countries, and to expect the aircrews of other nations to carry the burdens and the risks of striking ISIL in Syria to stop terrorism here in Britain.

That is why I believe that we should now take the decision to extend British airstrikes against ISIL into Syria, as an integral part of our comprehensive strategy to degrade ISIL and reduce the threat it poses to us.

At the same time, we must close down the ungoverned space in Syria that ISIL is exploiting, by working round the clock to bring about a political resolution to the war there.

That means putting Britain's full diplomatic weight, as a full member of an international coalition, behind the new political talks – the Vienna process. It means working through these talks to secure a transition to an inclusive Government in Syria that responds to the needs of all the Syrian people and with which the international community could co-operate fully to help restore peace and stability to the whole country. It means continuing to support the moderate opposition in Syria, so that there is a credible alternative to ISIL and Assad. It means using our aid budget to alleviate the immediate humanitarian suffering. It means insisting, with other countries, on the preparation of a proper stabilisation and reconstruction effort in Syria once the conflict has been brought to an end. And it means continuing, and stepping up, our effort here at home to counter radicalisation.

We must pursue all these tracks in parallel. As the threat from ISIL to our national security grows, we must take action - recognising that no course of action is without risk, but that inaction – not dealing with ISIL at source – also carries grave risk.

We have a comprehensive overall strategy in place to tackle the ISIL threat globally. This document sets out how extending our military contribution to Coalition operations in Syria would contribute both to our aim of reducing the ISIL threat to the UK and to delivering our objectives in Syria.

The second part of this response to the Foreign Affairs Committee addresses directly the seven questions and the risks which they identify.

The Threat from ISIL

The threat ISIL poses to Britain and to our citizens today is serious and undeniable.

ISIL has been behind more than 40 successful terrorist attacks around the world in just the last twelve months. The murder of 30 British citizens holidaying in Tunisia in June was linked to ISIL. In October, ISIL murdered 102 people at a peace rally in Ankara and a Russian passenger plane was blown out of the sky, killing 224 people flying home from Sharm-el-Sheikh – a resort visited by tens of thousands of British tourists each year. In November, ISIL murdered 43 people in Beirut and at least 130 people in Paris, including one Briton. ISIL terrorises and murders Iraqis and Syrians each and every day.

We know that ISIL has deadly intent to strike us at home too. In the last 12 months, Britain's police and Security Services have disrupted no fewer than 7 terrorist plots to attack the UK. All 7 plots were either linked to ISIL, or were inspired by ISIL's propaganda. ISIL has a dedicated external operations structure in Syria, which is planning mass casualty attacks around the world.

ISIL targets our young people, using sophisticated grooming techniques to lure them to Syria – to fight; to blow themselves up as suicide bombers; or to condemn themselves to lives of subjugation, oppression and cruelty. Around 800 British individuals of national security concern have travelled to Syria since the conflict began. Many have joined ISIL and other terrorist groups. Of those who are known to have travelled, about half have returned. Some of these, and many of those who remain in Syria, pose a threat to our security.

ISIL targets our way of life, spreading fear and terror. They exploit the internet both to radicalise and recruit the vulnerable, and to incite and direct extremists to carry out attacks outside Syria. They wish to target our infrastructure, and are seeking to orchestrate cyber attacks to do so.

There were 299 arrests in the UK in the year ending 31 March 2015 for terrorism-related offences: an increase of 31% compared with the previous year and the highest number since data collection began in 2001. We have also seen the youngest ever convicted terrorist in the UK, when a 15 year old boy was sentenced to life in prison last month, following his radicalisation over the internet and contact with individuals based in Syria who had urged him to plan acts of terror in the UK. In June, a 17 year-old from West Yorkshire became the youngest ever UK suicide bomber, blowing himself up in Iraq. This

is further evidence of ISIL poisoning the minds of our young people to commit the most terrible acts.

ISIL poses a significant threat to the stability of the region, including to the security of Jordan, one of the UK's key allies. ISIL's offshoots and affiliates are spreading instability and conflict in Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen and Nigeria. In the Middle East, they are seeking to establish their vision of a caliphate across Iraq and Syria, forcing people in those areas to yield to their rule or face torture or death. They have beheaded aid workers, organised systematic rape, enslaved Yazidi women and thrown gay people off buildings. All these atrocities belong to the dark ages.

The UK's Strategy for Syria

We do not have the luxury of being able to wait until the Syrian conflict is resolved before tackling ISIL. Nor should we wait until an attack takes place here: we should act in advance, recognising that there are inherent risks in any course. The threats we face are urgent. Equally, there will be no end to the chaos in which ISIL thrives and which fuels migration, for as long as the conflict in Syria endures.

This Government's strategy for Syria therefore reflects our need simultaneously to:

- Protect the UK here at home by maintaining robust counter-terrorism capabilities;
- generate negotiations on a political settlement, while supporting and preserving the moderate opposition;
- help deliver, through this process, a government in Syria that can credibly represent all of the Syrian people;
- degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL, including through Coalition military and wider action;
- continue our leading role in humanitarian support and forestall further migratory flows towards Europe;
- support stabilisation already underway in Iraq and plan for post-conflict reconstruction in Syria; and

- work in close partnership with our allies across the Middle East, to mitigate the impact of ISIL and other violent extremist groups on the stability of the region.

All these elements are linked - and all are important.

Some have argued that we should ally ourselves with Assad and his regime against the greater threat posed by ISIL, as the 'lesser of two evils'. But this misunderstands the causes of the problem; and would make matters worse. By inflicting brutal attacks against his own people, Assad has in fact acted as one of ISIL's greatest recruiting sergeants. We therefore need a political transition in Syria to a government that the international community can work with against ISIL, as we already do with the Government of Iraq.

The combination of the Assad regime's mass murder of its own people and, more recently, ISIL's bloodthirsty campaign has created a human catastrophe that has now crossed the borders of Europe. Over a quarter of a million people have been killed. Half the population of Syria have been forced to flee their homes. There are over 4 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, particularly Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. A further 6.5 million people are displaced inside the country.

Diplomatic Action

Since the start of the crisis the UK has worked for a political solution in Syria and was one of the prime movers of the Geneva Process.¹ We have played a key role in diplomatic efforts; pressing for an agreed international approach through the Geneva conferences and providing funding and support to successive UN Special Envoys.

¹ Geneva process: On 30 June 2012, the Foreign Ministers of nine States (including Russia), the Secretaries-General of the UN and the Arab League, as well as the European Union High Representative, came together as an Action Group for Syria to issue a Communiqué (see annex) setting out a plan for resolving the conflict in Syria. Further, from 22 January until 15 February 2014, the Syrian regime and the Syrian Opposition met in Montreux and Geneva in an attempt to negotiate a settlement to the conflict. The Geneva process did not make further progress until a larger Ministerial meeting in Vienna convened by US Secretary of State John Kerry, on 30 October 2015, which became the new International Syria Support Group.

There are now important signs of progress. The Foreign Secretary has played a central role in the establishment of the newly created International Syria Support Group (ISSG), which met for the second time in Vienna on 14 November.

The ISSG has brought together, for the first time, all of the major international players – including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the US, France and Turkey – behind a common vision of what is needed to end the war. While there are still differences to resolve, they agreed on 14 November an ambitious time frame for political negotiations to begin by the end of the year; a transitional government in place within six months; and a new constitution and free and fair elections within 18 months. The UK will support the UN Secretary General and Special Envoy De Mistura in their efforts to bring together the Syrian parties for these important discussions. I have no doubt that the increasing threat that we all face from ISIL was a significant factor in bringing the international community together in Vienna. We can now see, through the Vienna process, involving all the key players, a possible pathway – however rocky and uncertain – to a political resolution of the war in Syria.

So now is the time to scale up British diplomatic, defence and humanitarian efforts to resolve the Syrian conflict and to defeat ISIL.

We will intensify our diplomatic engagement, to build trust between the parties and to deliver an inclusive settlement for the people of Syria. That includes working with Russia and Iran, in order to build the consensus that will allow for a more effective and coordinated international campaign against ISIL.

Humanitarian Action

We will build further on our assistance to the Syrian people and their neighbours, which is already the biggest ever UK response to a humanitarian crisis. We have led the way in providing assistance to ease the suffering of the Syrian people, donating over £1.1bn. This is by far the largest commitment of any European country and is second only to the United States. By the end of June 2015, Britain had provided almost 20 million food rations, each enough to feed one person for a month; over 2.5 million medical consultations, and enabled over 1.6 million people in Syria and a further 980,000 people in neighbouring countries to access clean water. Meeting the immediate relief

and protection needs of the most vulnerable in Syria helps to support the capacity of the Syrian people to cope with the conflict; to remain in their homes wherever possible; and to lay the foundations for enduring stability and Syrian-led development.

British aid has also provided education to over 251,000 children in Syria and neighbouring countries. We have also pledged to resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrians in the UK over the course of this Parliament.

So far, about half a million people have sought refuge in Europe. But that number could increase significantly in 2016, if we cannot offer employment and education opportunities in the region and a realistic hope for a safe return home to Syria in the medium term.

That is why, in February 2016, I will co-host a Syria Conference in London with Germany, Kuwait, Norway and the UN, to ensure that the international community delivers a significant increase in the provision of immediate and longer-term support to vulnerable Syrians in Syria, and to Syrian refugees and their host communities, including a focus on education and jobs.

Military Action

I believe that the UK should now join Coalition airstrikes against ISIL in Syria.

Coalition air strikes in Iraq, in which we are participating, are having an effect. With Coalition air support, Iraqi forces have halted ISIL's advance and recovered 30% of the territory it had captured in Iraq. Only this month, Sinjar was liberated after last year's ISIL rout and mass killing of Yazidis, with the help of vital RAF and other partners' air support for Kurdish Peshmerga forces on the ground. Together with the RAF's Reaper drones, RAF Tornados have flown more than 1,600 missions over Iraq and carried out over 360 air strikes. RAF aircraft have destroyed ISIL targets in Iraq, including: key positions holding up Iraqi Security Forces on the ground (e.g. the last remaining strongpoint in Rabiya, which allowed the Kurdish Peshmerga to successfully liberate the town); large stockpiles of ammunition and explosives; several underground bunker and tunnel networks; and supply boats attempting to smuggle large quantities of ammunition down the Euphrates to isolated ISIL terrorists in Ramadi.

Military action is only one element of what is needed to defeat this appalling terrorist death cult. But it is a vital element: ISIL is not a threat that can be negotiated away. This is as true in Syria as it is in Iraq.

On 20 November 2015, the UN Security Council unanimously called on Member States to use all necessary measures to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL, and to deny them safe haven in Syria and Iraq. The US and France are already acting on this appeal and have asked us to join them, as have our partners in the region. ISIL poses a clear threat to our own national security. We should not stand back and let others carry the burden and the risks of protecting our country.

There is a credible military strategy to defeat ISIL in Syria, as well as in Iraq. We should not expect this to happen quickly. It will require patience and persistence. But it is achievable.

We will use the full weight of our diplomatic engagement in the Vienna process to bring about the proposed ceasefire between the regime and the opposition. While the political track progresses, the Coalition's military strategy aims to stop ISIL's advance through the air campaign, to strike them in their heartland and to put them under pressure by continuing to degrade and dismantle their economic and military capability. This military effort helps put ISIL on the defensive, suppressing their ability to conduct external attacks against the UK and our friends and allies. Military defeat will demonstrate clearly ISIL's inability to build and hold the 'caliphate' they aspire to.

Military action against ISIL will also relieve the pressure on the moderate opposition, whose survival is crucial for a successful transition to a more inclusive Syrian government. Syria has not been, and should not be, reduced to a choice between Assad or ISIL. Although the situation on the ground is complex, our assessment is that there are about 70,000 Syrian opposition fighters on the ground who do not belong to extremist groups.

As pressure on ISIL in Iraq has grown, and as we have learned more about the threat that ISIL poses to Britain and our allies, we have increasingly been confronted by a significant handicap in our ability to respond to that threat: the fact that British Forces are currently restricted to taking direct military action against ISIL only in Iraq.

This restriction has never made military sense. ISIL does not recognise the border between Syria and Iraq; it operates in a single ungoverned space that straddles both countries. Its practical and ideological headquarters are in Raqqa in Eastern Syria from where it conducts its attack planning, operations and recruitment. Hence the importance of the UK joining military action against ISIL in Syria. To be clear: our objective is to degrade ISIL, and to disrupt the threat it poses to the UK. It would not be to attack the Syrian regime.

Extending UK strikes to Syria would be a significant and welcome contribution to Coalition operations, adding our extensive capabilities to a renewed effort to defeat ISIL. The skill of RAF pilots and the particular capabilities of UK aircraft mean that we are able to conduct the most complex and precise strikes. Britain's military have the experience and expertise to sustain our role in the campaign for as long as required to get the job done; few other nations can. It is for these reasons that our allies want us as part of the campaign in Syria, and why I am confident that our doing so would make a meaningful difference.

Conclusion

Air strikes can degrade ISIL and arrest its advance, but they alone cannot defeat ISIL. We need partners on the ground to do that and we need a political solution to the Syrian conflict. That is why I have always been clear that defeating ISIL, in Iraq but even more so in Syria, requires action on two fronts: military and political.

There will be those who say that the UK might become more of a target by taking a greater role in the international effort to counter ISIL. The reality is that the threat posed by ISIL to the UK is already very high. ISIL already views the UK, along with other Western countries, as a legitimate target for its attacks. As part of the international Coalition, we are already carrying out air strikes against ISIL in Iraq, and providing refuelling, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support to Coalition strikes in Syria.

These are complex foreign policy and security challenges. It is tempting to see the complexity of the Syria conflict as an excuse to avoid tackling ISIL there, and it is equally tempting to see the threat posed by ISIL as an excuse to avoid facing the realities of the Syria conflict. Neither approach is correct. I believe

that we must tackle both the threat from ISIL and the Syria conflict in parallel, recognising the links but understanding the differences. On both, one thing is clear: the threats to our interests and to our people are such that we cannot afford to stand aside and not to act.

So with a political solution to the Syria conflict finally a realistic prospect; with greater international consensus than ever before on the global threat posed by ISIL; with the terrible cost of ISIL's brutality increasingly being seen on the streets of Paris, Beirut and elsewhere; and with the very real threat ISIL poses to UK citizens, I believe that we should extend our military campaign against ISIL into Syria.

Response to Questions in the Foreign Affairs Committee report on “Enabling the House to reach a decision”

In its report of 29 October, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee set out 7 points for the Government to answer “before asking the House of Commons to approve a substantive motion authorising military action” in Syria. The situation has evolved considerably since the Committee published its report: an escalation of ISIL attacks outside Syria and Iraq, including in Paris on 13 November; the re-launch of a credible diplomatic process – the Vienna Process – to resolve the Syrian conflict, through the International Syria Support Group (which met on 30 October and 14 November); and the unanimous adoption of UNSCR 2249 on 20 November, calling on Member States to take all necessary measures to address the threat from ISIL.

On an international strategy:

i) How the proposal would improve the chances of success of the international Coalition’s campaign against ISIL

The Global Coalition against ISIL comprises 63 countries (see annex). It has a coherent strategy of pressuring ISIL, especially in Syria and Iraq, through military, political and diplomatic action. This has included adopting UN Security Council Resolutions to: sanction ISIL and its affiliates (SCR 2170); to inhibit the use of Foreign Fighters (SCR 2178) and to squeeze ISIL’s funding sources (SCR 2199).

The Coalition’s military campaign is a key part of this strategy. Without it, ISIL would continue to expand the territory under its control, develop more terrorist affiliates across the Middle East and more widely, and encourage more people to join its murderous endeavour. The Coalition’s military action in Iraq – in which the UK is fully participating – is having some success. 30% of ISIL’s territory has been regained. But Raqqa in Syria is ISIL’s capital and home to a significant proportion of its thousands of hardened fighters, who move freely between Syria and Iraq. ISIL uses the chaos in Syria to make the money it needs from oil, and from taxing and extorting money from the Syrian people.

This reinforces the need for the Coalition to step up its military campaign in Syria to: reduce ISIL’s capacity to take more territory; cut off its supply routes

and sources of finance; and degrade its command and control. Without such action, the progress made by successful military operations in Iraq would be lost. That is why the US, France, Turkey and our Arab allies are all committed to expanding the campaign in Syria. They recognise that, as in Iraq, a greater UK military contribution to the campaign in Syria would mean greater military effect against ISIL. This is particularly the case for Turkey and Jordan, two of Syria's immediate neighbours who face the biggest threat from ISIL.

This greater military effect would not only help to reduce ISIL's capacity to plan attacks against the UK, it would speed progress towards a better future for the Syrian people, and support security for Syria's neighbours.

We have world-leading military capabilities to contribute, which many other countries do not possess. These include the ability to carry out dynamic and rapid air support to ground forces engaged in combat. The UK also has unique precision missile capabilities, which allow for accurate air strikes with low collateral damage (*see response to question 7 for more detail*). The Coalition campaign is entering a new phase, as it increasingly focuses on ISIL's command and control, supply lines and financial support. These targets increasingly play to the strengths of UK forces and our cutting-edge capabilities.

We would also bring political weight to the Coalition's campaign. The Coalition draws legitimacy from the broad number of nations that comprise it and contribute to the military action. This demonstration of unity to defeat ISIL sends a powerful message to ISIL, and those who might be drawn to its poisonous ideology.

ISIL generates around \$1.5m a day from oil - its largest source of revenue, and derived primarily from oil fields in Northern Syria. Cutting this off remains a high priority. As of last month, the Global Coalition had damaged or destroyed 260 oil infrastructure targets.

Following the adoption of UNSCR 2170 on terrorist financing in August 2014, we have been engaging diplomatically with countries in the Gulf and elsewhere to encourage compliance with sanctions regimes and ensure domestic regimes also counter terrorist financing. The international financial sector has largely been closed off to ISIL by measures taken through the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Egmont Groups, and by action taken by states as a response

to UN sanctions regimes. Any involvement in financing terrorist activity is illegal in the UK and, by law, the private sector must raise any suspicion of terrorist financing to the National Crime Agency. We work closely with the financial sector to monitor and disrupt terrorist financing activity.

The UK is already playing an important role in supporting the moderate Syrian opposition, who are under pressure from both ISIL and the regime; in assisting the Coalition with surveillance and intelligence assets; and in working with Jordan to ensure its resilience against ISIL. It makes little military sense for the UK not to bring its military assets to bear to bolster the Coalition's air strike capabilities.

By staying out of the Coalition's collective effort, we leave other nations, including those less capable than us and with whom we have collective defence arrangements, to meet our security needs for us. This can only have a damaging effect on Britain's standing in the world.

ii) How the proposed action would contribute to the formation and agreement of a transition plan for Syria;

Degrading and defeating ISIL will help promote a political transition by strengthening the moderate opposition forces who must be part of a transition, and by strengthening the territorial integrity of the state of Syria, which ISIL has sought to destroy.

Combating ISIL and resolving the broader Syrian conflict must be pursued in parallel. ISIL has grown and thrived in the chaos in Syria; filling the vacuum, and exploiting the fear and anger that the Assad regime has created. Both ISIL and the regime have focused their battlefield efforts against moderate Syrian opposition forces, who are brave enough to stand up against both of them. Intelligence also indicates that senior figures in the Assad regime are aware of and complicit in ongoing trading of resources with ISIL, including oil, wheat and cotton. This collaboration has taken place over many months. Reporting indicates that it continues, at least as recently as two months ago. The EU has introduced sanctions against those involved in the trade of oil between the Assad regime and ISIL.

An orderly political transition in Syria would preserve Syrian state structures but deliver a new Syrian government, which is able to meet the needs of the Syrian people, and with which the international community could cooperate fully against ISIL, as we do with the Government of Iraq. But that is not possible for as long as Assad remains in power without any timetable for his departure, and for as long as his security forces murder, torture, gas and bomb his own people.

Diplomacy must be at the heart of this, through the newly created International Syria Support Group (ISSG). The ISSG includes all the key international players, including the United States, France, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Recognition of the shared and urgent threat we all face from ISIL is now drawing the international community together around a political process.

But all members of the ISSG recognise that ISIL must be defeated militarily. The threat that ISIL poses cannot be negotiated away. Without degrading its military capabilities, we risk allowing ISIL to continue expanding its territorial control over Syria, which would reduce the chances of a peaceful settlement. ISIL has sought to destroy Syria's territorial integrity in its efforts to build a brutal caliphate across the borders of Syria and Iraq.

Alongside efforts to secure a political transition, together with our allies we are putting diplomatic pressure on Russia to end its attacks on moderate Syrian forces and instead coordinate its military efforts with the Coalition against ISIL. This it is beginning to do, following the ISIL bombing of Metrojet 9268 in Sharm El Sheikh, although Russian forces have continued to strike at moderate opposition forces in parallel.

ISIL presents a serious military threat to the tens of thousands of moderate Syrian fighters who are opposed to both the Assad regime and to ISIL, and who are under attack from both. These groups were at the heart of the peaceful protests that sprung up in 2011, when thousands of Syrians took to the streets to demand their freedom and dignity. They have fought on through four years of the regime's brutal campaign to extinguish them. They remain critical to Syria's future and represent a moderate vision for Syria, free from the

oppression by the Assad regime. The opposition has repeatedly reaffirmed this commitment, including at the Geneva II talks last year.

Coalition military action against ISIL will help to relieve some of the military pressure on those groups, enabling them to better protect Syrian civilians and to focus on their true objective – political transition in Syria. If extremists like ISIL are seen as the only realistic alternative to Assad, as Assad himself continues to claim, then there is much less incentive on the part of countries such as Russia and Iran to engage seriously on the necessary political transition. The survival of a credible third force, based around the moderate opposition, is therefore critical to the Coalition's overall political strategy.

iii) In the absence of a UN Security Council Resolution, how the Government would address the political, legal, and military risks arising from not having such a resolution;

There is now a UN Security Council Resolution. Resolution 2249 (of 20 November 2015) has now made a clear and unanimous determination that ISIL “constitutes a global and unprecedented threat to international peace and security”, and called upon Member States to take “all necessary measures... to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL... and to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria.”

There is a clear legal basis for military action against ISIL in Syria. The legality of UK strikes against ISIL in Syria is founded on the right of self-defence as it is recognised in Article 51 of the UN Charter. The right to self-defence may be exercised individually where it is necessary to the UK's own defence, and collectively in the defence of our friends and allies.

This reflects the multi-faceted and evolving threat that ISIL poses, and the response that is required to bring that threat to an effective end.

Collective Self Defence of Iraq

On 20 September 2014 the Government of Iraq wrote to the President of the UN Security Council seeking international assistance to strike ISIL sites and military strongholds, in order to end the constant threat to Iraq, protect Iraq's citizens and, ultimately, arm Iraqi forces and enable them to regain control of Iraq's borders. The main basis of the Global Coalition's actions against ISIL in Syria is the collective self-defence of Iraq.

The UK is already supporting the Coalition's efforts to degrade ISIL in Syria as a necessary aspect of effectively bringing an end to ISIL's armed attack on Iraq. On 21 October 2014, the Defence Secretary announced to Parliament that he was authorising flights of manned and unmanned surveillance aircraft over Syria to gather intelligence against ISIL. There is a solid basis of evidence on which to conclude, firstly, that there is a direct link between the presence and activities of ISIL in Syria and their ongoing attack on Iraq and, secondly, that the Assad regime is unwilling and/or unable to take action necessary to prevent ISIL's continuing attack on Iraq.

In light of these considerations and the scale of the threat posed by ISIL, military action that is necessary and proportionate to bring an end to ISIL's attack on Iraq is justified in accordance with the right of collective self-defence that is preserved in Article 51 of the UN Charter. The Coalition has relied on this legal basis for military action in Syria. Numerous States, including the USA, Australia, Canada and France have written to the UN Security Council explaining that they are taking action on the basis of the right of collective self-defence. In accordance with the requirements of Article 51 of the UN Charter, the UK notified the UN Security Council that it was taking military action as part of the Coalition's efforts in the collective self-defence of Iraq by a letter of 25 November 2014.

The underlying considerations which justified collective self-defence of Iraq for UK activity in Syria in 2014 remain today. The collective self-defence of Iraq provides a clear legal basis for the UK to increase its contribution to the Coalition's efforts against ISIL in Syria by taking direct military action itself, provided such activity meets the ongoing requirements of necessity and proportionality.

ISIL's threat to the UK and its attack on our Allies and partners

The threat from ISIL continues to evolve and now goes far beyond Iraq and Syria, as is all too clear from the external attack planning disrupted by the precision UK strike of 21 August (as I reported to the House on 7 September) and the tragic events of 13 November in Paris. For several months now, UK security agencies have been monitoring the development of ISIL's external attack planning capacity, which seeks to target both the UK and our allies and partners around the world. Resolution 2249 (2015) both condemns the ISIL's horrendous attacks that have taken place and notes ISIL's intent and capability to carry out further attacks. It then calls upon States to take lawful action to prevent such attacks.

It is clear that ISIL's campaign against the UK and our allies has reached the level of an "armed attack" such that force may lawfully be used in self-defence to prevent further atrocities being committed by ISIL. As well as the collective self-defence of Iraq, there is therefore an additional legal basis to take action in our own self-defence and that of other allies and partners as well, where they request our assistance. The use of force in self-defence is of course limited to what is necessary and proportionate and we have made clear that we will act at all times in accordance with the law.

iv) Whether the proposed action has the agreement of the key regional players (Turkey; Iran; Saudi Arabia; Iraq); if not, whether the Government will seek this before any intervention;

Countries from across the Middle East and North Africa are at the heart of the Coalition's action against ISIL in Syria and Iraq. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Oman, Bahrain and Morocco are all members of the Coalition. Many are providing logistical and direct military support to the Coalition's action against ISIL. Others are playing a leading role across the different lines of effort, including: cutting off ISIL's finances; stopping its recruitment of foreign fighters; and countering ISIL's propaganda and its perversion of Islam. Syria's neighbours are also shouldering the enormous burden of hosting over 4 million refugees from the conflict.

Both Turkey (which faces an acute threat from ISIL in Northern Syria) and Jordan (which faces particular threats from ISIL in Southern Syria and from Western Iraq) have made clear that they would welcome the UK joining the Coalition's strikes against ISIL in Syria.

Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Russia are all members of the International Syria Support Group and are engaging in the political strategy to end the Syrian conflict.

Russia is taking direct military action against ISIL in Syria and supported UNSCR 2249. UK aircraft on Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions over Syria already operate in accordance with the terms of the air safety arrangements for the Coalition, agreed with Russia by the US. These are applied to all Coalition aircraft operating over Syria and the Coalition will continue to take whatever action is necessary to ensure air safety for its aircraft. Iran has made clear through its actions that its objectives in Syria have, until now, been very different from our own. But we are now engaged in diplomacy with Iran and hope that it will now use its influence to help to bring about a peaceful resolution to the crisis, but we will not allow Iran a veto over our vital security interests.

v) Which ground forces will take, hold, and administer territories captured from ISIL in Syria.

The model that is starting to work in Iraq involves Coalition air support enabling Iraqis – from both the Iraqi Security Forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga – to take back, hold and administer territory regained from ISIL.

This is more difficult in Syria, because Assad's forces are still fighting directly against the moderate opposition and there is no prospect of intervention by an external ground force. Any large-scale external force, even of Arab or other Muslim troops, could risk inflaming the conflict further, rather than contributing to a political settlement.

But, whilst political talks on a settlement for Syria take place, both the Kurds and other moderate armed groups have shown themselves capable of both taking territory from ISIL, and holding and administering it. Although the situation on the ground is complex, our assessment is that there are around

70,000 Syrian opposition fighters on the ground who do not belong to extremist groups.

Where they have retaken ground, they have relieved the suffering that the civilian population previously endured under ISIL control.

The Syrian Kurds have successfully defended Kurdish areas in Northern Syria from sustained ISIL attack and retaken territory from ISIL, such as around the city of Kobane. The territories under their control are stable. They are an important element of any counter ISIL effort in Syria. The Kurds will also play an important role in a political settlement for Syria which respects Syria's territorial integrity and the parameters set out in the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

But only moderate Sunni Arabs can retake traditionally Sunni Arab areas such as Raqqa. Such moderate armed groups in Northern Syria have shown themselves capable of defending territory north of Aleppo from sustained ISIL assault. They have stopped ISIL's attempts to capture the main humanitarian border crossing with Turkey and sweep into Idlib province. Supported by Coalition airpower, the opposition have held their ground, protecting a vital supply route into Aleppo. In Southern Syria, the Southern Front of the Free Syrian Army has consolidated its control over significant areas and has worked to prevent terrorists such as ISIL and Jabhat Al Nusra from operating.

Since the beginning of the conflict, communities in Syria have taken control of their own administration, even while under daily attack by the Assad regime. Moderate armed groups have also been able to hand over ground taken in fighting to civilian councils, with many previous public servants remaining in place. Civilian councils have overseen the delivery of water, electricity, phone lines, and waste management, while the armed groups have focussed on security.

Key achievements have included:

- Local councils and emerging local governance structures have become stronger, enabling them to deliver basic services to a population of over 1.1 million people. This helps preserve space for the moderate opposition in advance of a higher-level political settlement.

- The Nobel Peace Prize-nominated Syrian Civil Defence teams (or “White Helmets”) provide search and rescue services and basic first aid to victims of the conflict. There are now over 2,700 civil defenders across eight governorates; who have saved over 30,000 lives since 2013. Over 2,500 Free Syrian Police (FSP) officers serve some 900,000 Syrians living across Idlib and Aleppo.
- Community resilience has been strengthened by reopening schools, repairing roads and sanitation systems, and re-establishing water supplies.
- Local authorities and Syrian experts have helped maintain agricultural services, ensuring that farmers can keep up local wheat and vegetable production.

UK non-lethal support and advice to these moderate armed groups and civilian groups has helped them achieve these important goals. These are amongst the range of tools that the UK has established under the ‘Conflict, Stability and Security Fund’ to assist moderate Syrian groups with establishing effective governance in areas wrested from ISIL or regime control, rather than letting them fall into the hands of extremist groups. This is vital support, whilst we work towards a full transition for Syria, which can integrate these vital actors into new state structures.

In the medium-term, we will work through the political negotiations towards a ceasefire between the Syrian armed forces and moderate opposition, which would create the conditions to allow both sides to focus their military efforts on ISIL. In such circumstances, ground taken from ISIL in Syria could be administered effectively by one or other of those forces. While Assad’s forces as currently constituted and led would be unlikely to make an intense effort to take on ISIL, a political transition in Syrian would allow new leadership and reform of the Syrian Arab Army to enable it to tackle terrorist groups in defence of the Syrian Nation. Without transition, it will continue to be difficult to generate a Sunni force able to fight ISIL and hold ground in Eastern Syria.

Post-Conflict Planning

The success of our strategy over the long term will rest on the ability of the international community to deliver a stabilisation and reconstruction effort in Syria. The UK will play a central role in this work, but we cannot do so alone. It will require a sustained and coordinated investment from the international community over many years. Preserving the institutions of the Syrian state through transition will be vital: de-Baathification after the Iraq war was a significant mistake, which we must avoid repeating.

The relationships we have developed through our existing support to moderate opposition actors across the country provide a good framework on which stabilisation activity would be based, and from which UK support could be scaled up as required. The support we provide to over 2,500 Free Syrian Police helps them serve over 900,000 people in Idlib and Aleppo, and our support to local councils and other local structures helps provide essential services in at least 27 communities across the country, reaching over 1.1 million people. The UK is already helping to coordinate international planning efforts, working closely with US, Turkish and Jordanian counterparts on the ground, and as part of the International Stabilisation Working Group bringing together Coalition governments under the leadership of Germany and the UAE.

Internationally, the UK is a contributor to the Syria Recovery Trust Fund, which distributes much needed resources through local governance structures. To augment and complement international efforts, we have established an Emergency Stabilisation Response Mechanism with the aim of getting governance, public security and service delivery up and running in Syria following military successes. In the South of the country, in concert with the US, we have pre-positioned equipment (ambulances, vehicles, medical supplies, and operational funds) during our “support surge” ahead of the opposition’s offensive on Dera’a City. Elsewhere we are looking to begin training in areas such as unexploded ordnance clearance, to enable clearance activity to begin quickly when the situation allows.

Rebuilding Syria as ISIL is pushed back and after the broader conflict comes to an end will be a much more significant challenge requiring a properly

resourced and coordinated response from the international community and Syria's neighbours. Building on lessons from previous conflicts, planning and preparation for helping to stabilise post-ISIL Syria is a priority. Stabilisation is one of the core lines of effort for the Coalition. The UK can play a leading role in ensuring cohesion between civilian and military efforts, for example by embedding further civilian planners in military headquarters and joint planning for combined military-civilian stabilisation responses. The UK is engaging with the Coalition and with EU partners to identify areas in which more can be done. The Syria Conference in February 2016 in London will also be an opportunity to focus international attention on these challenges.

On the military imperative:

- vi) What the overall objective is of the military campaign; whether it expects that it will be a “war-winning” campaign; if so, who would provide war-winning capabilities for the forces; and what the Government expects will be the result of extending airstrikes to Syria.**

The objective of our counter-ISIL campaign is to degrade ISIL's capabilities so that it no longer presents a significant terrorist threat to the UK or an existential threat to Iraq, Syria or other states. We are working alongside our partners, including in the Coalition, to deny ISIL safe havens from which to operate, to prevent ISIL from obtaining the resources to mount attacks, and to counter its poisonous ideology.

The UK's strategy for Syria reflects our need simultaneously to: maintain robust counter-terrorism capabilities to protect the UK; generate negotiations on a political settlement, while preserving the moderate opposition; suppress and degrade ISIL through Coalition military and wider action; continue our leading role in humanitarian support and forestall further migratory flows towards Europe; and work in close partnership with our allies across the Middle East, mitigate the impact of ISIL and other violent extremist groups on the stability of the region.

Acting together, the Coalition has the most advanced military capabilities in the world. But the business of “war-winning” is about more than those military capabilities alone. The Coalition's military campaign is just one – albeit

key – strand of its strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. That requires a comprehensive response, including: squeezing ISIL's finances; cutting off its flow of foreign fighters; challenging its poisonous ideology; providing humanitarian assistance to those in need; and working for a settlement to the Syria conflict and greater political inclusion in Iraq. The UK is centrally involved in all these activities, including action in the UN Security Council and in the establishment of a counter-ISIL communications centre in London, which I announced at the UN General Assembly in September.

This communications centre will coordinate and drive the Coalition's strategic communications to counter ISIL's violent extremism, to help ensure that no information or media space is left uncontested. It will strengthen our collective response to ISIL's propaganda, helping countries that have previously lacked the means or knowledge necessary to deliver effective communications against ISIL. Its target audiences will be the same as those targeted by ISIL's propaganda, focusing on Iraq and Syria, but including global audiences at risk of influence from ISIL's propaganda.

Military action seeks to degrade ISIL's capabilities, so that Iraqi security forces can effectively secure Iraq and moderate forces in Syria can defend territory they control. Coalition support in pushing ISIL back will help these forces take the fight back to ISIL, recognising that this work can only be completed with an inclusive political solution in Syria. Such action also reduces ISIL's ability to threaten Syria and Iraq's neighbours, who are so important to maintaining stability in a precarious region, and who have done so much to absorb and shelter millions of refugees.

Our Syria strategy aims to enable a ceasefire to be established between the regime and the opposition. It aims to isolate ISIL's heartland in north East Syria through coordinated military action and help create the space for a political settlement in parallel. The suppression of ISIL in Raqqa is crucial to disrupting, at source, the direct threat ISIL poses to the UK and other countries.

Increasing action against ISIL in Syria will bolster Iraq's ability to defend itself: by degrading both ISIL's economic and oil infrastructure and its cross-border communication and supply routes.

vii) What extra capacity the UK would contribute to the Coalition's actions in Syria.

The UK has advanced military capabilities that bring a qualitative edge above those deployed by most other Coalition partners. In Iraq, for example, the RAF is able to carry out “dynamic targeting” where our pilots are able to provide rapid support to other units engaged in combat and in need of immediate air support. We also have the Brimstone missile which enables us to strike accurately with low collateral damage, therefore increasing the scope for strikes against specific ISIL targets – even the US do not possess this capability.

The UK currently contributes airborne Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, refuelling support and command and control to the Coalition in Syria. Our ISR capability is second to none. The RAPTOR pod on our Tornado aircraft has no rival. It enables the Tornado to gather 60% of the Coalition's tactical reconnaissance in Iraq, while also being equipped for strikes. Currently, therefore, it is illogical that our aircraft are deployed to carry out the important task of finding and tracking high value targets but cannot complete the task of launching the strikes against them.

Our capabilities give us an important and distinct role to play in Coalition efforts to target the upper tiers of the ISIL leadership, its economic and oil infrastructure and its communication and supply routes. Oil revenues matter to ISIL, as does its freedom of movement between Iraq and Syria. A greater UK role would help the Coalition more effectively to disrupt ISIL's internal lines of communication, including making it more difficult for them to move south and threaten Jordan. UK action would put pressure on ISIL where they feel most secure and help erode the myth of ISIL's caliphate.

ENDS

Annex – Geneva Action Group for Syria Communiqué June 2012

Action Group for Syria Final Communiqué 30.06.2012

1. On 30 June 2012, the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, the Foreign Ministers of China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, Turkey, Iraq (Chair of the Summit of the League of Arab States), Kuwait (Chair of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States) and Qatar (Chair of the Arab Follow-up Committee on Syria of the League of Arab States), and the European Union High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy met at the United Nations Office at Geneva as the Action Group for Syria, chaired by the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria.
2. Action Group members came together out of grave alarm at the situation in Syria. They strongly condemn the continued and escalating killing, destruction and human rights abuses. They are deeply concerned at the failure to protect civilians, the intensification of the violence, the potential for even deeper conflict in the country, and the regional dimensions of the problem. The unacceptable nature and magnitude of the crisis demands a common position and joint international action.
3. Action Group members are committed to the sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity of Syria. They are determined to work urgently and intensively to bring about an end to the violence and human rights abuses and the launch of a Syrian-led political process leading to a transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and enables them independently and democratically to determine their own future.
4. To secure these common objectives, the Action Group members (i) identified steps and measures by the parties to secure full implementation of the six-point plan and Security Council resolutions 2042 and 2043, including an immediate cessation of violence in all its forms; (ii) agreed on guidelines and principles for a political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people; and (iii) agreed on actions they would take to implement the above in support of the Joint Special Envoy's efforts to facilitate a Syrian-led political process. They are convinced that this can encourage and support progress on the ground and will help to facilitate and support a Syrian-led transition.

Identified steps and measures by the parties to secure full implementation of the six-point plan and Security Council resolutions 2042 and 2043, including an immediate cessation of violence in all its forms

5. The parties must fully implement the six-point plan and Security Council resolutions 2042 and 2043. To this end:

- All parties must re-commit to a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms and implementation of the six-point plan immediately and without waiting for the actions of others. The government and armed opposition groups must cooperate with UNSMIS with a view to furthering the implementation of the above in accordance with its mandate.
- A cessation of armed violence must be sustained with immediate, credible and visible actions by the Government of Syria to implement the other items of the six-point plan including:
 - Intensification of the pace and scale of release of arbitrarily detained persons, including especially vulnerable categories of persons, and persons involved in peaceful political activities; provision without delay through appropriate channels of a list of all places in which such persons are being detained; the immediate organization of access to such locations; and the provision through appropriate channels of prompt responses to all written requests for information, access or release regarding such persons
 - Ensuring freedom of movement throughout the country for journalists and a non-discriminatory visa policy for them;
 - Respecting freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully as legally guaranteed.
- In all circumstances, all parties must show full respect for UNSMIS' safety and security and fully cooperate with and facilitate the Mission in all respects.
- In all circumstances, the Government must allow immediate and full humanitarian access to humanitarian organizations to all areas affected by the fighting. The Government and all parties must enable the evacuation of the wounded, and all civilians who wish to leave to do so. All parties must fully adhere to their obligations under international law, including in relation to the protection of civilians.

Agreed Principles and Guide-lines for a Syrian-led transition

6. Action Group members agreed on the following 'Principles and Guide-lines on a Syrian-led transition':
 - Any political settlement must deliver to the people of Syria a transition that:
 - Offers a perspective for the future that can be shared by all in Syria;
 - Establishes clear steps according to a firm time-table towards the realization of that perspective;
 - Can be implemented in a climate of safety for all, stability and calm;
 - Is reached rapidly without further bloodshed and violence and is credible.

I. Perspective for the Future

The aspirations of the people of Syria have been clearly expressed by the wide range of Syrians consulted. There is an overwhelming wish for a state that:

- Is genuinely democratic and pluralistic, giving space to established and newly emerging political actors to compete fairly and equally in elections. This also means that the commitment to multi-party democracy must be a lasting one, going beyond an initial round of elections.
- Complies with international standards on human rights, the independence of the judiciary, accountability of those in government and the rule of law. It is not enough just to enunciate such a commitment. There must be mechanisms available to the people to ensure that these commitments are kept by those in authority.
- Offers equal opportunities and chances for all. There is no room for sectarianism or discrimination on ethnic, religious, linguistic or any other grounds. Numerically smaller communities must be assured that their rights will be respected.

II. Clear Steps in the Transition

The conflict in Syria will only end when all sides are assured that there is a peaceful way towards a common future for all in Syria. It is therefore essential that any settlement provides for clear and irreversible steps in the transition according to a fixed time frame. The key steps in any transition include:

- The establishment of a transitional governing body which can establish a neutral environment in which the transition can take place. That means that the transitional governing body would exercise full executive powers. It could include members of the present government and the opposition and other groups and shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent.
- It is for the Syrian people to determine the future of the country. All groups and segments of society in Syria must be enabled to participate in a National Dialogue process. That process must not only be inclusive, it must also be meaningful—that is to say, its key outcomes must be implemented.
- On this basis, there can be a review of the constitutional order and the legal system. The result of constitutional drafting would be subject to popular approval.
- Once the new constitutional order is established, it is necessary to prepare for and conduct free and fair multi-party elections for the new institutions and offices that have been established.
- Women must be fully represented in all aspects of the transition.

III. Safety, stability and calm

Any transition involves change. However, it is essential to ensure that the transition can be implemented in a way that assures the safety of all in an atmosphere of stability and calm. This requires:

- Consolidation of full calm and stability. All parties must cooperate with the transitional governing body in ensuring the permanent cessation of violence. This includes completion of withdrawals and addressing the issue of the disarming, demobilization and reintegration of armed groups.
- Effective steps to ensure that vulnerable groups are protected and immediate action is taken to address humanitarian issues in areas of need. It is also necessary to ensure that the release of the detained is completed rapidly.
- Continuity of governmental institutions and qualified staff. The public services must be preserved or restored. This includes the military forces and security services. However, all governmental institutions, including the intelligence services, have to perform according to human rights and professional standards and operate under a top leadership that inspires public confidence, under the control of the transitional governing body.
- Commitment to Accountability and National Reconciliation. Accountability for acts committed during the present conflict must be addressed. There also needs to be a comprehensive package for transitional justice, including compensation or rehabilitation for victims of the present conflict, steps towards national reconciliation and forgiveness.

IV. Rapid steps to come to a Credible Political Agreement

It is for the people of Syria to come to a political agreement, but time is running out. It is clear that:

- The sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria must be respected.
- The conflict must be resolved through peaceful dialogue and negotiation alone. Conditions conducive to a political settlement must now be put in place.
- There must be an end to bloodshed. All parties must re-commit themselves credibly to the six-point plan. This must include a cessation of armed violence in all its forms and immediate, credible and visible actions to implement items 2-6 of the six-point plan.
- All parties must now engage genuinely with the Joint Special Envoy. The parties must be prepared to put forward effective interlocutors to work expeditiously towards a Syrian-led settlement that meets the legitimate aspirations of the people. The process must be fully inclusive to ensure that

the views of all segments of Syrian society are heard in shaping the political settlement for the transition.

The organized international community, including the members of the Action Group stands ready to offer significant support for the implementation of an agreement reached by the parties. This may include an international assistance presence under a United Nations Mandate if requested. Significant funds will be available to support reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Agreed actions Group members will take to implement the above in support of the Joint Special Envoy's efforts to facilitate a Syrian-led political process

7. Action Group members will engage as appropriate, and apply joint and sustained pressure on the parties in Syria to take the steps and measures outlined in paragraph 5.
8. Action Group members are opposed to any further militarization of the conflict.
9. Action Group members underscore to the Government of Syria the importance of the appointment of an effective empowered interlocutor, when requested by the Joint Special Envoy to do so, to work on the basis of the six-point plan and this communiqué.
10. Action Group members urge the opposition to increase cohesion and be in a position to ensure effective representative interlocutors to work on the basis of the six-point plan and this communiqué.
11. Action Group members will give full support to the Joint Special Envoy and his team as they immediately engage the Government and opposition, and consult widely with Syrian society, as well as other international actors, to further develop the way forward.
12. Action Group members would welcome the Joint Special Envoy's further convening of a meeting of the Action Group should he deem it necessary to review the concrete progress taken on all points agreed in this communiqué, and to determine what further and additional steps and actions are needed from the Action Group to address the crisis. The Joint Special Envoy will also keep the United Nations and the League of Arab States informed.

Annex - Statement from 14 November 2015 Vienna meeting of the International Syria Support Group

Vienna, November 14, 2015

Meeting in Vienna on November 14, 2015 as the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), the Arab League, China, Egypt, the EU, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United Nations, and the United States to discuss how to accelerate an end to the Syrian conflict. The participants began with a moment of silence for the victims of the heinous terrorist attacks of November 13 in Paris and the recent attacks in Beirut, Iraq, Ankara, and Egypt. The members unanimously condemned in the strongest terms these brutal attacks against innocent civilians and stood with the people of France.

Subsequently, the participants engaged in a constructive dialogue to build upon the progress made in the October 30 gathering. The members of the ISSG expressed a unanimous sense of urgency to end the suffering of the Syrian people, the physical destruction of Syria, the destabilization of the region, and the resulting increase in terrorists drawn to the fighting in Syria.

The ISSG acknowledged the close linkage between a ceasefire and a parallel political process pursuant to the 2012 Geneva Communique, and that both initiatives should move ahead expeditiously. They stated their commitment to ensure a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition based on the Geneva Communique in its entirety. The group reached a common understanding on several key issues.

The group agreed to support and work to implement a nationwide ceasefire in Syria to come into effect as soon as the representatives of the Syrian government and the opposition have begun initial steps towards the transition under UN auspices on the basis of the Geneva Communique.

The five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council pledged to support a UNSC resolution to empower a UN-endorsed ceasefire monitoring mission in those parts of the country where monitors would not come under threat of attacks from terrorists, and to support a political transition process in accordance with the Geneva Communique. All members of the ISSG also pledged as individual countries and supporters of various belligerents to take all possible steps to require adherence to the ceasefire by these groups or individuals they support, supply or influence. The ceasefire would not apply to

offensive or defensive actions against Da'esh or Nusra or any other group the ISSG agrees to deem terrorist.

The participants welcomed UN Secretary General Ban's statement that he has ordered the UN to accelerate planning for supporting the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire. The group agreed that the UN should lead the effort, in consultation with interested parties, to determine the requirements and modalities of a ceasefire.

The ISSG expressed willingness to take immediate steps to encourage confidence-building measures that would contribute to the viability of the political process and to pave the way for the nationwide ceasefire. In this context, and pursuant to clause 5 of the Vienna Communiqué, the ISSG discussed the need to take steps to ensure expeditious humanitarian access throughout the territory of Syria pursuant to UNSCR 2165 and called for the granting of the UN's pending requests for humanitarian deliveries. The ISSG expressed concern for the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons and the imperative of building conditions for their safe return in accordance with the norms of international humanitarian law and taking into account the interests of host countries. The resolution of the refugee issue is important to the final settlement of the Syrian conflict. The ISSG also reaffirmed the devastating effects of the use of indiscriminate weapons on the civilian population and humanitarian access, as stated in UNSCR 2139. The ISSG agreed to press the parties to end immediately any use of such indiscriminate weapons.

The ISSG reaffirmed the importance of abiding by all relevant UN Security Council resolutions, including UNSCR 2199 on stopping the illegal trade in oil, antiquities and hostages, from which terrorists benefit.

Pursuant to the 2012 Geneva Communiqué, incorporated by reference in the Vienna statement of October 30, and in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118, the ISSG agreed on the need to convene Syrian government and opposition representatives in formal negotiations under UN auspices, as soon as possible, with a target date of January 1. The group welcomed efforts, working with United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura and others, to bring together the broadest possible spectrum of the opposition, chosen by Syrians, who will decide their negotiating representatives and define their negotiating positions, so as to enable the political process to begin. All the parties to the political process should adhere to the guiding principles identified at the October 30 meeting, including a commitment to Syria's unity, independence,

territorial integrity, and non-sectarian character; to ensuring that State institutions remain intact; and to protecting the rights of all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity or religious denomination. ISSG members agreed that these principles are fundamental.

The ISSG members reaffirmed their support for the transition process contained in the 2012 Geneva Communiqué. In this respect they affirmed their support for a ceasefire as described above and for a Syrian-led process that will, within a target of six months, establish credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance, and set a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution. Free and fair elections would be held pursuant to the new constitution within 18 months. These elections must be administered under UN supervision to the satisfaction of the governance and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including the diaspora, eligible to participate.

Regarding the fight against terrorism, and pursuant to clause 6 of the Vienna Communiqué, the ISSG reiterated that Da'esh, Nusra, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the UN Security Council, and further, as agreed by the participants and endorsed by the UN Security Council, must be defeated. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan agreed to help develop among intelligence and military community representatives a common understanding of groups and individuals for possible determination as terrorists, with a target of completion by the beginning of the political process under UN auspices.

The participants expect to meet in approximately one month in order to review progress towards implementation of a ceasefire and the beginning of the political process.

Annex - Members of the Global Coalition to counter-ISIL – at 23 November 2015

Albania	Finland	Lebanon	Qatar
Arab League	France	Lithuania	Romania
Australia	Georgia	Luxembourg	Saudi Arabia
Austria	Germany	Macedonia	Serbia
Kingdom of Bahrain	Greece	Malaysia	Singapore
Kingdom of Belgium	Hungary	Moldova	Slovakia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Iceland	Montenegro	Slovenia
Bulgaria	Republic of Iraq	Morocco	Somalia
Canada	Ireland	Netherlands	Spain
Croatia	Italy	New Zealand	Sweden
Cyprus	Japan	Nigeria	Taiwan
Czech Republic	Jordan	Norway	Tunisia
Denmark	Republic of Korea	Oman	Turkey
Arab Republic of Egypt	Kosovo	Panama	Ukraine
Estonia	Kuwait	Poland	United Arab Emirates
European Union	Latvia	Portugal	United Kingdom
			United States

- 63 States and 2 International Organisations

ANNEX – UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2249 – 20 NOVEMBER 2015

The Security Council,

Reaffirming its resolutions 1267 (1999), 1368 (2001), 1373 (2001), 1618 (2005), 1624 (2005), 2083 (2012), 2129 (2013), 2133 (2014), 2161 (2014), 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2195 (2014), 2199 (2015), 2214 (2015) and its relevant presidential statements,

Reaffirming the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations,

Reaffirming its respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and unity of all States in accordance with purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter,

Reaffirming that terrorism in all forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivations, whenever and by whomsoever committed,

Determining that, by its violent extremist ideology, its terrorist acts, its continued gross systematic and widespread attacks directed against civilians, abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, including those driven on religious or ethnic ground, its eradication of cultural heritage and trafficking of cultural property, but also its control over significant parts and natural resources across Iraq and Syria and its recruitment and training of foreign terrorist fighters whose threat affects all regions and Member States, even those far from conflict zones, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh), constitutes a global and unprecedented threat to international peace and security,

Recalling that the Al-Nusrah Front (ANF) and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida also constitute a threat to international peace and security,

Determined to combat by all means this unprecedented threat to international peace and security,

Noting the letters dated 25 June 2014 and 20 September 2014 from the Iraqi authorities which state that Da'esh has established a safe haven outside Iraq's borders that is a direct threat to the security of the Iraqi people and territory,

Reaffirming that Member States must ensure that any measures taken to combat terrorism comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law;

Reiterating that the situation will continue to deteriorate further in the absence of a political solution to the Syria conflict and emphasizing the need to implement the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012 endorsed as Annex II of its resolution 2118 (2013), the Joint Statement on the outcome of the multilateral talks on Syria in Vienna of 30 October 2015 and the Statement of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) of 14 November 2015,

1. Unequivocally condemns in the strongest terms the horrifying terrorist attacks perpetrated by ISIL also known as Da'esh which took place on 26 June 2015 in Sousse, on 10 October 2015 in Ankara, on 31 October 2015 over Sinaï, on 12 November 2015 in Beirut and on 13 November 2015 in Paris, and all other attacks perpetrated by ISIL also known as Da'esh, including hostage-taking and killing, and notes it has the capability and intention to carry out further attacks and regards all such acts of terrorism as a threat to peace and security;

2. Expresses its deepest sympathy and condolences to the victims and their families and to the people and Governments of Tunisia, Turkey, Russian Federation, Lebanon and France, and to all Governments whose citizens were targeted in the above mentioned attacks and all other victims of terrorism;

3. Condemns also in the strongest terms the continued gross, systematic and widespread abuses of human rights and violations of humanitarian law, as well as barbaric acts of destruction and looting of cultural heritage carried out by ISIL also known as Da'esh;

4. Reaffirms that those responsible for committing or otherwise responsible for terrorist acts, violations of international humanitarian law or violations or abuses of human rights must be held accountable;

5. Calls upon Member States that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures, in compliance with international law, in particular with the United Nations Charter, as well as international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law, on the territory under the control of ISIL also known as Da'esh, in Syria and Iraq, to redouble and coordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL also known as Da'esh as well as ANF, and all other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the United Nations Security Council, and as may further be agreed by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and endorsed by the UN Security Council, pursuant to the Statement of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) of 14 November, and to eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria;

6. Urges Member States to intensify their efforts to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters to Iraq and Syria and to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism, and urges all Members states to continue to fully implement the above-mentioned resolutions;

7. Expresses its intention to swiftly update the 1267 committee sanctions list in order to better reflect the threat posed by ISIL also known as Da'esh;

8. Decides to remain seized of the matter.
