What is the order of battle (ORBAT) and military capability of ISIL/Daesh in Syria and Iraq?

2. The UK and Coalition partners assess that Daesh has 20-30,000 fighters under arms. We have only limited insight into the internal structure of these forces, with the size of ‘units’ highly likely to be variable and subject to change depending on the task. This fluidity is a reflection of the flexible manner in which Daesh deploys its fighters.

3. Daesh’s fighting forces have proved to be militarily adept and adaptable throughout Iraq and Syria. Much of its success has come from the flexibility of its tactics, which are a hybrid of conventional military, guerrilla and terrorist tactics. These tactics in themselves are adapted to the requirements of the individual operational conditions. The use of improvised explosive devices (IED) and use of vehicle borne IEDs/suicide bombers is an avowed tactic.

4. Daesh deploys its fighters to what it judges to be high value operations, such as on the “Mar’a line” in Syria and to Mosul in Iraq. It has repeatedly used company-sized expeditionary forces to probe areas for vulnerabilities and, when opportunities are identified, it rapidly surges its forces to exploit enemy weaknesses. This has proved to be an effective approach.

5. In response to Coalition airstrikes, Daesh has taken increased defensive measures by dispersing and hiding (often among the civilian population), or camouflaging high value military equipment. Daesh has also tried to counter the aerial threat to its logistics chain by minimising the movement of personnel, equipment and resources in large convoys.

6. Daesh has captured a wide variety of weapons on the battlefield, both Russian and Western in origin. It also buys some weaponry on the black market. It possesses tanks, armoured and light vehicles, personnel carriers and artillery systems, including US Abrams tanks and HUMVEEs and Soviet-era T-55/62/72 tanks and BM-series and 120mm/GRAD/Katyusha multiple rocket-launch platforms.

7. It is in possession of a range of man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) including Russian-origin SA-7/SA-14 (Strela) and SA-18/SA-24 (Igla) and Chinese manufactured FN-6. In late 2014, Daesh used an FN-6 to shoot down an Iraqi helicopter. Other air defence capability includes heavy machine gun/cannon (12.7mm/14.5mm/23mm/57mm and others) and towed anti-aircraft (AA) weapons.

8. Although Daesh has captured several airfields in Syria with aircraft present, there is no record of Daesh making use of manned aircraft. Small-scale commercial unmanned aerial vehicle technology is available and used regularly.

9. Daesh’s weapons inventory also includes anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) (TOW, Konkurs and likely Fagot, Metis, Milan and Kornet variants); variously-sized mortars/rockets
It also possesses a range of largely Soviet-era guns and ammunition - 7.62mm-variant AK ammunition and weaponry; 7.62mm machine gun equipment (RPK, RPD, PK and other variants); heavier machine guns and cannon (12.7mm, 14.5mm, 23mm, likely including Russian-designed DShK, ZU and ZSU); rocket launchers (M79, M80 and unguided bazooka variants); rocket propelled grenades of several warhead variations and SPG9-variant recoilless delivery systems. Daesh has also made use of NATO 5.56mm (M16, M4) ammunition/weaponry captured in Iraq.

10. There are credible reports of the use of chemical weapons by Daesh. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is confident that sulphur mustard was used in an attack in late August in North West Syria in an area contested between Daesh and Syrian opposition elements. The OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mission has not attributed responsibility, but continues to investigate this, and other allegations of chemical weapon attacks in Syria. The Government of Iraq, with support from the OPCW, is investigating allegations of chemical weapons use by non-state actors in Iraq - believed to be Daesh.

What strategy and tactics should we employ to confront Daesh?

11. The UK’s comprehensive strategy to tackle Daesh globally includes military, political, diplomatic and humanitarian action. The UK is a leading part of a Global Coalition of 65 countries and international organisations, including many in the region, united to defeat Daesh on all fronts. We are attacking Daesh militarily, but we are also squeezing its finances, disrupting the flow of fighters, challenging its poisonous ideology and working to stabilise areas liberated from Daesh. At the heart of our comprehensive strategy is recognition that to defeat Daesh in its heartland, we need to bring an end to the civil war and to have in place a transitional Government in Syria. Diplomatic efforts to deliver a negotiated settlement and a transitional government are continuing.

12. In terms of tackling Daesh funding, we have identified Daesh’s illicit oil industry as its biggest single source of revenue, accounting for approximately 40% of its revenues. The Coalition is now targeting Daesh’s oil production, with significant effect. Building on the requirements of UN Security Council Resolution 2199 – co-sponsored by the UK, which requires all states to prevent the transfer of economic resources to Daesh – the Chancellor of the Exchequer attended the first ever meeting of Finance Ministers at the Security Council in New York on 17 December to agree a further strengthening of the UN’s sanctions regime against Daesh. We are working to encourage all countries to strictly enforce sanctions with investigations and prosecutions. At home, the Prime Minister has ordered a review into the funding of Islamist extremist activity in the UK which is due to report in the spring.

13. In order to counter Daesh’s poisonous propaganda the UK has led in the creation of a Coalition Communications Cell (with staffing and financial support from Coalition partners), which is working to combat and undermine the Daesh brand, ensuring that no communications space currently exploited by Daesh is left uncontested. The Coalition Cell is working to generate a full range of communications at a pace and scale necessary to highlight Daesh’s cruel and inhumane treatment of individuals under its control; its failures on the battlefield; and its perversion of Islam. It has: deployed a UK strategic communications expert to Baghdad to support the Iraqi government’s effort to undermine Daesh and to promote political reconciliation; commissioned research into the factors encouraging local communities and individuals to support Daesh and developed a range of projects to counter
these factors; supported communications activity which challenges Daesh’s claims to oversee a functioning state, with testimony from individuals living under Daesh demonstrating the desperate circumstances in which they live, deprived of food, power and clean water.

14. The effort to prevent the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and extremist travellers is vital to degrading the capacity of Daesh, both in military terms and in countering Daesh’s narrative. We are working with priority countries such as Lebanon, Tunisia and Jordan in order to increase border capacity and aviation security. We continue to work with Turkey and others to build an increasingly sophisticated network to interdict foreign fighters seeking to enter Syria. We are also working with our European partners on issues such as information sharing, aviation security and removing online terrorist propaganda; since February 2010, the UK's Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU) has taken down more than 120,000 pieces of unlawful terrorist-related content which encourages or glorifies acts of terrorism and is working with Europol to encourage Member States to follow. We are encouraging European partners to share information through fora such as the Schengen Information System II (SISII).

15. Our military strategy is based on the use of airpower to degrade Daesh and to provide a breathing-space in which local forces in Syria and Iraq can prepare to take the fight to Daesh on the ground. We have already seen that in response to Coalition operations, Daesh, already an irregular fighting force, is seeking to merge its fighters and its materiel within civilian populations, effectively using them as human shields. This increases the importance of high-quality intelligence to help distinguish Daesh targets from the civilian population. Once that intelligence is collected and assessed, it is high-end precision weapons systems which allow for targets to be prosecuted whilst keeping civilian casualties to a minimum.

16. We do not see a role for western combat troops in Syria and Iraq. Rather, we are working to reinforce the capabilities of local forces through Coalition training programmes imparting key tactical skills, weapons handling techniques and counter-IED expertise.

17. Military operations need to be followed by stabilisation efforts to provide security, governance and services to populations in areas liberated from Daesh. The UK is working with the Government of Iraq and Global Coalition partners to stabilise areas that have been liberated from ISIL in Iraq. The UK is contributing £2 million to UNDP’s stabilisation efforts, including UNDP-led stabilisation projects in Tikrit. UNDP have helped bring water, electricity, health care and education back to Tikrit. Around 130,000 people, 70% of the population, have returned home to Tikrit district since it was liberated from ISIL. We and Coalition partners are currently working with the Government of Iraq partners to prepare stabilisation plans for the liberation of Ramadi in Anbar Province.

18. The stabilisation strategy required for Syria is very different. Firstly, efforts to stabilise and reconstruct rest on an inclusive political settlement. That means a Syrian Government broadly accepted by its people. This is why the UK is pushing so strongly for a political settlement through the International Syria Support Group. Second, we need to preserve key elements of Syria’s existing institutions and expertise. That’s why the UK is already working with existing Syrian institutions to establish a strong foundation to support transition and restore stability as quickly as possible. Third, we are working with moderate partners on the ground who enjoy the confidence and support of the locals. Insurgency is, at root, a competition between different systems of governance – it is at the heart of Daesh’s,
and the regime’s, offer to Syrians. Through the Conflict Stability and Security Fund, the UK supports a viable, effective, moderate alternative that is already having an impact.

19. But the success of this strategy over the long term will rest on the ability of the international community to come together and deliver the necessary effort. The UK will play a central role in galvanising this. We are already helping to coordinate international planning, working closely with regional partners and as part of Global Coalition’s Stabilisation Working Group. The Syria Conference in February 2016 in London will also be an opportunity to focus international attention on this issue.

**Will airstrikes alone be effective in degrading and defeating Daesh?**

20. The initial phase of the Coalition’s military strategy launched last year was designed to support local forces on the ground so that they could hold Daesh’s rapid advance through Syria and Iraq. Coalition air operations helped halt the rapid movement of Daesh forces which overwhelmed Mosul in August 2014 and went on to threaten Baghdad. In Iraq, Daesh has been pushed back through the close co-ordination of Coalition airpower and local forces – Iraqi Government security forces and the Kurdish Regional Government’s Peshmerga – on the ground. Coalition air power has provided crucial close support to Iraqi and Kurdish forces ground offensives, most recently in Baji, Sinjar and Ramadi. At the same time, the Coalition has worked to build the capacity of Iraqi and Kurdish forces to help them take the fight to Daesh on the ground. More than 30% of the territory in Iraq once occupied by Daesh has now been recovered.

21. The Coalition military effort has now moved into the degrade phase of the campaign. While continuing to support local forces in close combat to maintain pressure on Daesh on the ground on multiple fronts, both in Iraq and Syria, Coalition air power is being applied to diminish Daesh numbers and morale; to degrade its ability to manoeuvre by destroying its vehicles and by raising the costs of open movement; to destroy defensive positions and materiel stocks; to prevent resupply of forward positions; to isolate combat elements from leadership structures; to eliminate senior leaders; and to impact upon revenue streams, particularly from Daesh’s illicit oil operations.

22. The Coalition strategy recognises that while air strikes can degrade Daesh military capabilities, they are not sufficient on their own to defeat them. Air strikes are only one component in a military strategy which, must be accompanied by a political solution to deliver long term peace and security to the region. In Iraq, Prime Minister Abadi’s government provides a partner with whom the Coalition can work politically and militarily. The situation in Syria is more complex, with a multi-faceted civil war under way and a government which has lost all legitimacy, with which we cannot co-operate. Nevertheless, despite coming under pressure from the Asad regime, Daesh and other extremist elements and, latterly, from Russian air strikes, non-extremist opposition groups have successfully defended swathes of territory in the north west, north east and south of the country. The Coalition is reaching out to these groups to build effective relationships which can help to take the fight to Daesh on the ground.

23. Ultimately, we recognise that the defeat of Daesh in its heartland in Syria needs the establishment of an inclusive transitional Government in Syria so that all members of the international community can work with the Syrian army, Syrian opposition groups and Kurdish forces to take the fight to Daesh on the ground and to free their country.
Does the RAF have the capacity in terms of equipment and personnel, to sustain or increase the involvement in a campaign of airstrikes against Daesh in Syria?

24. The level of UK air operations was already rising in response to Coalition requirements in late 2015. Since the deployment of Typhoon and additional Tornado following the 02 December vote, we have seen further significant increases in UK air operations, with strike activity rising sharply (from a monthly average of 29 in May-October 2015, to 54 in November and 86 in December) and growing as a proportion of the overall Coalition air effort.

25. The RAF has well-established plans for ensuring it has the personnel and the skills it needs to sustain operations and enduring commitments. RAF Tornado, Typhoon, Reaper, Voyager and Sentinel aircraft are currently deployed to the region. We plan for these deployments to continue. The UK E-3D and Airseeker aircraft have returned to the UK for an essential regeneration period to maintain the capability but will redeploy to the Middle East later this year. Regeneration periods are coordinated with Coalition partners (who also conduct regeneration on a periodic basis) to ensure that operational requirements are met. Typhoon also has the ability to surge additional aircraft and personnel for time-bounded periods.

26. With the extension of the third Tornado Squadron to 2018 the Tornado Force can sustain an enduring commitment to UK military operations in Syria and Iraq until the Tornado out of service date of 2019. Typhoon can deploy a single Squadron on an enduring basis whilst continuing to support UK and Falkland Islands Quick Reaction Alert tasks. The Typhoon Force will also provide the planned UK commitment to NATO’s Baltic Air Policing during 2016, and elements of the RAF contribution to the Defence Exercise Program.

27. It is planned that Reaper support to military operations in Syria and Iraq will continue at the current rate. UK training for Reaper crews is being redesigned to generate additional crews quicker to underpin the current UK Reaper capability, and we also expect to implement options to increase crews from US training courses from mid-2016.

28. UK Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms and capabilities (Sentinel, Airseeker, Reaper aircraft and Raptor & Litening III pods) are operating at maximum sustainable capacity in support of the Coalition campaign. Current force regeneration requirements mean that the immediate provision of any additional UK ISR capability is not possible without impacting on future capability.

Which ground troops are active in theatre, countering Daesh, which might benefit from UK air strikes?

29. In Iraq, the Coalition works closely with the Iraqi Government and the government of the autonomous Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRG) supporting Iraqi (including Kurdish) security forces. Coalition air strikes which have already allowed these local forces to take back more than 30% of the territory previously occupied by Daesh. Coalition air strikes in Syria, against Daesh HQs, infrastructure and logistic supply routes, are also weakening Daesh’s ability to continue to prosecute the campaign in Iraq.
30. In Syria, the Joint Intelligence Committee assesses that there are around 70,000 opposition fighters who do not belong to extremist groups. There are also around 20,000 Syrian Kurdish fighters. We aim to improve our understanding of these groups, their capabilities and intent and to assess how we might assist them in taking the fight to Daesh.

Is there adequate intelligence to ensure that airstrikes are accurately targeted against Daesh?

31. While there are undoubtedly gaps in Coalition understanding of Daesh’s dispositions and organisation, we have sufficient intelligence to strike accurately and effectively, and have done so since the start of operations.

32. Within Iraq, the presence of Iraqi security forces allows good quality intelligence to be gathered from units on the ground as well as from the air. A high percentage of RAF strikes have been against Daesh targets in, or just behind, the front line. A very high level of discrimination is possible in these circumstances, with effective attacks conducted against Daesh targets engaged in close combat with Iraqi forces. We have been able to assemble very precise intelligence on Daesh fortified positions facing Kurdish forces in northern Iraq. This allowed tightly focused deliberate strikes to be conducted by RAF and other coalition aircraft in advance of the Kurds’ highly successful offensive operations over the past year, such as that which liberated Sinjar in November 2015.

33. The importance of reliable, high-quality intelligence underlines the great value attached by our coalition partners to the UK’s contribution, since RAF Tornado GR4 and Reaper are amongst the most capable tactical reconnaissance platforms committed to the campaign. Similarly, the RAF Sentinel and Airseeker platforms represent a significant component of the overall strategic surveillance capability. The intelligence gathered by these aircraft make possible not only strikes by the RAF, but also very many other successful attacks by coalition jets.

34. There is a greater challenge in assembling the breadth of intelligence we would wish to have inside Syria, particularly on those aspects of Daesh’s infrastructure where, following early coalition missions, elements of its rear area operations have been dispersed and better hidden. But with the adoption of armed reconnaissance missions over Syria following the 2 December 2015 vote, our aircraft are now better placed to gather intelligence and to respond more quickly than before, and to contribute to the Coalition’s overall intelligence picture.

What would be the impact of deploying UK Ground Troops?

35. Iraq’s Prime Minister Abadi has been adamant that the presence of significant numbers of foreign – specifically Western – forces in a combat role in Iraq would be counter-productive and would only tend to feed Daesh’s own narrative that it is defending Muslim lands against what it characterises as “infidel invaders”. We assess that this is equally true in respect of the position in Syria.

Will military action in Syria increase the UK’s ability to broker a political peace process and transition to a democratically-elected representative government?

36. Degrading and defeating Daesh in Syria will help promote a political peace process by removing one source of pressure on the moderate opposition forces that must be part of
any transition, and strengthen the territorial integrity of the state of Syria, which Daesh does not recognise and has sought to destroy.

37. Syria has not been, and should not be, reduced to a choice between Asad and Daesh. Daesh has grown and thrived in the chaos in Syria; filling the vacuum, and exploiting the fear and anger that the Asad regime has created. Intelligence indicates that senior figures in the Asad regime are aware of and complicit in on-going trading of resources with Daesh, including oil, wheat and cotton. This collaboration has taken place over many months, and reporting indicates that it continues. The EU has introduced sanctions against those involved in the trade of oil.

38. Both Daesh and the Asad regime have focused their battlefield efforts on the moderate Syrian opposition groups which were at the heart of the peaceful protests of 2011, and who continue to fight for a better future in the face of Russian strikes, regime brutality and Daesh barbarism. Coalition military action against Daesh in Syria will help to relieve some of the military pressure on the moderate groups, enabling them to better protect Syrian civilians and participate in the political peace process. If extremists like Daesh are seen as the only realistic alternative to Asad (as Asad 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 crucial for a successful transition to a more inclusive Syrian government.

39. Military action against Daesh is one part of our strategy in Syria, alongside our diplomatic and humanitarian efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict. We now have an established diplomatic mechanism for talks in the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). All the major international players – including the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran, amongst others – have agreed the need for a ceasefire, and urgent steps to end attacks on civilians. In its communiqué of 14 November, the ISSG set out its goals: a transitional Government within six months, and a new constitution and fresh elections within 18 months. In addition, through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), the UK has the second largest non-humanitarian programme in Syria, delivering nearly £100 million of support since the start of the crisis.

40. Nonetheless, all members of the ISSG recognise that Daesh must be defeated militarily. The threat that Daesh poses cannot be negotiated away. Without degrading its military capabilities, we risk allowing Daesh to continue expanding its territorial control over Syria, which would reduce the chances of a peaceful settlement. Military defeat would demonstrate clearly Daesh’s inability to build and hold the ‘caliphate’ they aspire to, helping restore Syria’s territorial integrity, and helping bring stability to Syria and Iraq.

**Should the UK engage bilaterally with Iran and Russia on deconfliction if the decision is taken to extend air strikes into Syria**

41. Although Russia and Iran claim to oppose Daesh, in Syria both are committed to supporting the Asad regime, not fighting Daesh. The bulk of Russian airstrikes continue to be focused on areas where there is little Daesh presence. Russian air attacks are often coordinated with Iranian forces and their Hezbollah allies fighting alongside Asad forces against the non-extremist opposition. In some areas, Daesh has benefitted from such operations exploiting the vulnerability of opposition forces weakened by Russian airstrikes.
42. The Coalition cannot cooperate with Iran and Russia in their prosecution of the campaign under these circumstances. There is a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in place signed by Russia and the US (on behalf of the Global Coalition) designed to ensure the safe separation of air operations over Syria. The UK and other Coalition members abide by the terms of this MoU which provide means of direct contact between the Coalition Combined Air Operations Centre and the relevant Russian military authorities on air safety matters.

13 January 2016