

## Defence Committee Enquiry on The situation in Iraq and Syria and the threat posed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

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### Preface

1. This submission will address the following aspects in response to the Committee's questions:

- Counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation policy, including the ideological threat;
- The role of Air Power in operations, especially remote piloted aircraft (RPA) and their systems; and
- The need to consider ongoing operations and policy in the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and the associated National Security Strategy (NSS).

The Committee is taking evidence to address several questions and our responses to these are below.

### 1) What are the threats represented by ISIL, other militant groups and the Assad regime, politically, ideologically and militarily in Iraq and Syria? How might they evolve?

2. The threat from ISIL and other Islamist militant groups in the region has changed from that previously encountered from Al-Qaida. Up until now, Al-Qaida has represented a terrorist threat to the UK and other Western countries. This has taken the form of mass-casualty terrorism, such as seen in Kenya, Tanzania and 9/11.<sup>1</sup> Since the intervention in Afghanistan, the threat from that group and its affiliate Ansar al-Sharia has been reduced, though it has resurfaced to greatest effect in Yemen.<sup>2</sup> The change has been the control by militants of large swathes of territory and the enforcement of a radical form of Islam<sup>3</sup>, not normally recognised in the traditional Sunni canon.<sup>4</sup>

3. Politically, over the last three years, organisations like ISIL, Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al Shabaab in Somalia and Boko Haram in Nigeria have been starting to govern territory while putting into practice doctrines evolved from Sayyid Qutb, Ayman al-Zawahiri and others.<sup>5</sup> A significant

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<sup>1</sup> START - *Background Report: 9/11, Ten Years Later*, The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2011,

[http://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/files/announcements/BackgroundReport\\_10YearsSince9\\_11.pdf](http://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/files/announcements/BackgroundReport_10YearsSince9_11.pdf)

Last accessed 27 November 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Simcox – 'Ansar al-Sharia and Governance in Southern Yemen', *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Volume 14, January 2013 and Christopher M Faulkner and David H Gray – 'The Emergence of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Effectiveness of US Counterterrorism Efforts', *Global Security Studies*, Volume 5, Issue 1, Winter 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Reidel and Matthew G Olsen – *A National Counterterrorism Center Threat Assessment of ISIL and Al Qaeda in Iraq, Syria and Beyond* – NCTC – 2014/09/03, Brookings and NCTC, Washington, September 3, 2014, pages 6 and 7.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Rudolph Peters - *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam: A Reader*, (Markus Wiener, Princeton, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> See Mary Habeck – *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, (Yale University Press, 2006); Albert J Bergesen (Ed.) – *The Sayyid Qutb Reader*, (Routledge 2008), pages 43-80; John Calvert – *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, (Hurst, London, 2010); Emmanuel Sivan – *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*, (Yale University Press, 1990); Gilles Kepel: *The Roots of Radical Islam*, (Saqi, 2005), pages 34 to 69 and 197 to 250; and Alia

difference from the past, emerging as far back as Abu Musab al-Zaqawi's quarrelsome relations with al-Qaida in 2004,<sup>6</sup> is the degree of ultraviolent Jihadism on offer which has the attraction, for recruits, of elevating jihad to a sixth pillar in the Islamic Religion with an instrumental redefinition of the underlying tenets.<sup>7</sup> This is significant because the traditional way of waging jihad had been seen as the 'lesser jihad', the greater one being the struggle against the less worthy characteristics of one's own behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Terminologically, those waging jihad were seen as mujahideen, fighting in a worthy cause, as opposed to jihadis, a newer term which places them in a different category.<sup>9</sup>

4. In the territory it governs, ISIL's imperatives concern the monopoly of the use of force, coupled with the willingness to use it as a tool of terror, while at the same time needing to convey the legitimacy of their rule and the doctrine which underpins it.<sup>10</sup>

5. Ideologically, in the longer term, that doctrine represents the greatest danger to the UK, although for the moment ISIL's energies seem concentrated against Arab regimes and sectarian rivals or religious minorities in the Middle East, rather than large-scale violence within the homelands of 'far enemies' like the US or UK.<sup>11</sup> The last iteration of the CONTEST and Prevent Strategies highlighted the danger of Al-Qaida influenced radicalisation<sup>12</sup> and the ideas which underpin this are virtually the same as those represented by ISIL.<sup>13</sup> So, as an issue, the dangers of an ISIL-influenced radicalisation are, at the core, the same as Al-Qaida-influenced radicalisation. However, the most important development which differentiates them is the fact that they hold territory, that they are terming a Caliphate.<sup>14</sup> This is a tangible gain which not only differentiates them from Al-Qaida but also demonstrates their effectiveness in persevering over near, and far, enemies. So the appeal is being part of a larger entity which has not, until recently, been challenged. The long-term establishment of territory governed only by ISIL would be a major threat to the international system.

6. For a youth seeking to join Al-Qaida, say in Pakistan or Yemen, there is the ever present threat of attack by remote piloted aircraft and other aircraft, as well as the strong possibility of being selected for a suicide bombing. Yet for those wishing to join ISIL, the attraction for recruits is fighting the enemy more conventionally and the feeling of being able to do whatever they like, such as spinning armoured personnel carriers and subjecting women to enslavement and abuse.<sup>15</sup> The threat to the UK is that this combines a jihadi doctrine with the opportunity for adventure, increasing its appeal.<sup>16</sup>

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Brahimi – 'Al-Qaeda as Just Warriors: Osama bin Laden's Case for War', in Jeevan Deol and Zaheer Kazmi (Ed.s) – *Contextualising Jihadi Thought*, (Hurst, London, 2012), pages 51 to 70.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Charles Brisard with Damien Martinez – *Zarqawi: The New Face of al-Qaeda*, (Polity, 2005), pages 145 to 151.

<sup>7</sup> Omar Ashour – 'Post-Jihadism and the Ideological Revisions of Armed Islamists', in Deol and Kazmi Op Cit. Pages 131 to 141.

<sup>8</sup> David Cook – *Understanding Jihad*, (University of California Press, 2005), pages 32 to 48 and Asma Afsaruddin – *The First Muslims: History and Memory*, (Oneworld, Oxford, 2008), pages 106 to 128.

<sup>9</sup> Vincenzo Oliveti – *Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its Consequences*, (Amadeus Books, 2002), pages 45 to 48 and Gilbert Ramsay – 'Jihadiyya: The Usage of the Arabic Word "jihadi" and its Immediate Cognates on the Worldwide Web', Paper delivered at the Rethinking Jihad Conference, Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World, University of Edinburgh, 9 September 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Riedel and Olsen Op Cit. Pages 7 and 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmed Rashid - 'ISIS: What the US Doesn't Understand' *New York Review of Books* blog, 2 December 2014, <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2014/dec/02/isis-what-us-doesnt-understand/>, last accessed 4 December 2014.

<sup>12</sup> HMG – *Prevent Strategy*, Command Paper 8092, June 2011, pages 43 to 53 and HMG – *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism*, Command Paper 8123, July 2011, pages 21 to 37.

<sup>13</sup> Riedel and Olsen Op Cit. Pages 15 and 16.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Jazeera - 'Sunni rebels declare new 'Islamic caliphate'', *Al-Jazeera*, 30 Jun 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/isis-declares-new-islamic-caliphate-201462917326669749.html>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Catherine M. Russell – 'ISIL's Abuse of Women and Girls Must Be Stopped', *The Huffington Post*, 12 September 2014, <http://www.state.gov/s/gwi/rls/rem/2014/231551.htm>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Collins – 'Jihad Cool: The young Americans lured to fight for ISIS militants with rap videos, adventurism and first hand accounts of the 'fun' of guerrilla war', *Daily Mail*, 19 June 2014,

7. ISIL has been extremely adept at broadcasting its message through the internet and social media.<sup>17</sup> The ability to counter this is essential to British and allied policy in the region. This will need to address the ideological message, as well as undermining the concept that joining ISIL is either a religious imperative or an adventure free of consequence. Penalties envisaged by the UK Government<sup>18</sup> will go a long way to stop that, although they do of course carry with them the risk of creating a disgruntled category of semi-reformed jihadists and concerned families. Their operation should, therefore, be regularly reviewed. There are opportunities for systematic information warfare - collecting, analysing and refining 'memes of disillusion'<sup>19</sup> - relating to abundant stories from returning disenchanted jihadis, of ISIL arrogance, pointless brutality, corruption, and abusive and self-aggrandising decisions by commanders. These could be optimally reformulated and systematically disseminated within Sunni Muslim communities in the UK and abroad in order to desacralise and delegitimise ISIL's reputation using the most appropriate methods and media to reach the target audience of young men and, increasingly, women. Media appearances and lectures by resettled and repentant former fighters might be organised, although of course those appearing would have to be protected or resettled in confidentiality. Legal and other incentive arrangements could no doubt be worked out. In this sense, the more reachable returning ISIL combatants could become a persuasive resource.

8. Militarily, ISIL threatens the peace of the region, the security of allies and, potentially, the flow of natural resources to the West. ISIL has been able to grow as it has because of the moral, political and military weakness of the Syrian and Iraqi regimes, and Western apprehensions, as well as a lack of will. ISIL has become the world's best funded terrorist group in consequence of their impressively violent advance and oil-rich and lucratively exportable territorial acquisitions.<sup>20</sup>

9. The Assad regime has not posed a direct threat to the UK, although its brutal behaviour will have radicalised its opponents in a way which creates dangers for British citizens and interests. Other colleagues from the Institute for Conflict, Co-operation and Security have already commented on aspects of the Syrian position in a separate submission<sup>21</sup> and we will not add to it here, except to emphasise that resolution or at least mitigation of the Syrian Civil War is likely to be a precondition for an adequate overall international response to the ISIL problem.

10. In terms of the evolving threat, ISIL does have the capability to strengthen still further if it remains effectively unchallenged. This is particularly so because its momentum and demonstrable success has reinforced its narrative of divine inspiration. But ISIL may have reached its culminating point in the struggle for Kobani and the present stalemate in Anbar. Opposition has begun to mobilise, with the unlikely conjunction of Iranian and American, as well as other Allied involvement. This is likely to cause allies of convenience<sup>22</sup> to switch sides and increase popular unwillingness to accept the severity of

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<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2661727/Jihad-Cool-The-young-Americans-lured-fight-ISIL-militants-rap-videos-adventurism-hand-accounts-fun-guerrilla-war.html#ixzz3KMdQ705S>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas E Ricks and Carter Malkasian – 'If ISIS had a 3-24 (IV): The importance of propaganda, intimidation and conquests', Foreign Policy, 9 October 2014,

[http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/10/09/if\\_isis\\_had\\_a\\_3\\_24\\_iv\\_the\\_importance\\_of\\_propaganda\\_intimidation\\_and\\_conquests](http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/10/09/if_isis_had_a_3_24_iv_the_importance_of_propaganda_intimidation_and_conquests), last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Prime Minister's Office - *Actions to counter ISIL*, First published: 13 August 2014, last updated: 10 November 2014, pages 4 and 5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/isil-uk-government-response>, last accessed 28 November 2014

<sup>19</sup> Paul Schulte – *Leaving Extremism Behind: Outline of a Desacralising Information Strategy*, Unpublished Paper, July 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Riedel and Olsen Op Cit. Page 6 and Luay Al-Khatteeb – 'The UN Strikes Back at ISIL's Black Economy', *The Huffington Post*, 23 August 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2014/08/23-un-strikes-back-at-isil-black-economy>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>21</sup> The situation in Iraq and Syria and the threat posed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Written evidence submitted by Professor Scott Lucas, Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security, University of Birmingham and EA WorldView & Professor Stefan Wolff, Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security, University of Birmingham.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Jazeera – 'Sunni rebels form uneasy alliance with ISIL: Sunni fighters say Maliki government's sectarian policies have forced them to in to an alliance with ISIL', *Al-Jazeera*, 29 June 2014,

extreme Islamist rule. At least in the short term, ISIL may therefore be facing further, political, doctrinal and ideological reverses. Comparatively, this has happened in parts of Yemen where territory has been recaptured from AQAP and its ally Ansar al-Sharia.<sup>23</sup>

## 2) What are the objectives which form the basis for the UK's participation in the international coalition's strategy in a) Iraq, b) Syria, and c) the region?

11. The UK's objectives have been set out under a series of headings in *Actions to counter ISIL*.<sup>24</sup> We consider the steps outlined there to be a sensible basis upon which to proceed.

12. In Iraq, the UK has supported the Government and the Western-trained military. The complication has been that this is a regime which has favoured the Shia majority at the expense of the previous ruling Sunni minority. Many Sunni groups have joined ISIL and it will need to be a priority to ensure that they have been split from ISIL Central, a process which has already started.<sup>25</sup>

13. The UK's policy in Syria has been to support moderate opposition to the Assad regime, especially the direct provision of non-lethal aid and more lethal means through regional allies. This has been seen by many as too little, too late, and more radical groups have risen to the fore. This said, fighting has taken place between Islamist and Jihad factions and clashes between Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIL have left at least 3,000 dead.<sup>26</sup> Splitting associated groups from ISIL Central in Syria would degrade the movement significantly and could put its base at al-Raqqa at risk.

14. Regionally, the UK has sought to balance tensions but it is only by containing threats that the outbreak of a regional war, pitting Iran, Syria and their regional allies against the opposition, Saudi Arabia and her allies, can be prevented.<sup>27</sup> We consider such steps important in the prevention of a wider war in the region.

15. Another factor for the UK and its policy is the managing of relations with regional allies, such as Israel and Turkey. This is particularly important in the case of the latter, where the Western relationship with the Kurds is a particularly sensitive issue.

16. More macrocosmically, the interlinked problems of ISIL, Sunni extremism in the Middle East, and the dangerous excitements it stirs up among the Islamic diaspora worldwide, will not be overcome completely without major improvement in the governance of the post-colonial Middle Eastern states. This does not just mean attractively multi-sectarian agreements among their political classes; it needs to address questions of employment levels and access to land as well as redistribution and reduced corruption. The UK should accept that systemic transformation is a long term, difficult and indirect goal but should not

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<http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2014/06/sunni-rebels-form-uneasy-alliance-with-isil-201462944353678753.html>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Simcox Op Cit.

<sup>24</sup> *Actions to counter ISIL*, Op Cit. Pages 2 to 5.

<sup>25</sup> Imran Khan – 'ISIL and Sunni rebels: an end to the affair?' *Al-Jazeera*, 1 October 2014, <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/middle-east/isil-and-sunni-rebels-end-affair>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Jazeera – 'ISIL says it faces war with Nusra in Syria: Rebel faction slams rival group Jabhat al-Nusra for "betrayal and treason" as it responds to demand to end infighting', *Al-Jazeera*, 8 March 2014,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/03/isil-says-it-faces-war-with-nusra-syria-20143719484991740.html>, last accessed 28 November 2014;

Liz Sly – 'Al-Qaeda disavows any ties with radical Islamist ISIS group in Syria, Iraq', *The Washington Post*, 3 February 2014,

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/al-qaeda-disavows-any-ties-with-radical-islamist-isis-group-in-syria-iraq/2014/02/03/2c9afc3a-8cef-11e3-98ab-fe5228217bd1\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/al-qaeda-disavows-any-ties-with-radical-islamist-isis-group-in-syria-iraq/2014/02/03/2c9afc3a-8cef-11e3-98ab-fe5228217bd1_story.html), last accessed 28 November 2014;

and Brian Michael Jenkins - *Brothers Killing Brothers: The Current Infighting Will Test al Qaeda's Brand*, RAND, PE-123-RC (2014), [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE123/RAND\\_PE123.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE123/RAND_PE123.pdf), last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Clarke – 'A Collision Course for Intervention: Introduction', *Syria Crisis Briefing*, RUSI, 25 July 2012, pages 2 and 3.

ignore it and should use its own resources, especially in DFID, and British influence in the EU and UN to work towards it. The balance between this longer term goal and shorter term operational and diplomatic exigency is will never be easy to calculate. Emergencies and opportunities will impose their own imperatives. But the need for systemic change in the Middle East should not be forgotten.

17. The UK could and should also continue use its diplomatic resources, including personal connections with ruling groups, to add to international pressures on the Saudi and other Gulf monarchies to cease their financial and ideological support of Salafist groups and Wahhabi clerics who support violent extremism.

### **3) What should the UK Government's goals be for domestic and regional security, humanitarian assistance and political stability in Iraq and Syria?**

18. The primary goal in the delivery of these objectives should be the defeat of ISIL. This will provide the UK Government with the opportunity to start improving domestic and regional security and the distribution of humanitarian assistance, in both Iraq and Syria.

19. The UK and other countries should engage ISIL with air assets and, if necessary, Special Forces. Any intervention may be seen to have more credibility when conducted in concert with allies on the ground, such as the Kurds, and, ideally, Sunni Arab ground forces. The Kurds are being trained and armed so that they can defend their homes and communities but more will need to be done to make them a viable force.<sup>28</sup> The same will be the case with other groups and the Iraqi Army, in addition to the Anbari tribes.

20. The defeat of ISIL cannot be by military means alone. There also needs to be a political and ideological effort to remove any legitimacy they have in the region and to provide a counter-narrative to their thinking and doctrine.<sup>29</sup> The latter will need to be through regional allies with the authority to do this, as well as domestically here in the UK and other Western countries.

21. ISIL will not be decisively and lastingly defeated if the Iraqi Government does not come to represent all the groups of that country. Their combatants could, if necessary, always try to melt away into civilian life and await a suitable opportunity to resort to force. The recent change of regime holds out some promise of the removal of grievances which added so much fuel to the fire in the first place.<sup>30</sup> That said, we are mindful that, unless something is done to rein in Shia Militias, these gains may be both small and short-lived.<sup>31</sup>

22. Regarding Syria, the UK and other governments will need to take a view on whether this is possible, necessary, or desirable in areas not under Assad regime or ISIL control, as well as whether any action needs to be direct or through regional allies.

23. Although the declaration of a R2P-type humanitarian emergency in the region does not place any legal burden on the UK to act, it is important that the UK Government continues to contribute humanitarian aid. This is set out in *Actions to counter ISIL* and we support these efforts.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Indian Express – ‘Seven countries join US in arming Iraqi Kurds against ISIL’, *The Indian Express*, 27 August 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/americas/seven-countries-join-us-in-arming-iraqi-kurds-against-isil/#sthash.56rV5ohw.dpuf>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Oliveti Op Cit. Pages 75 to 79.

<sup>30</sup> Susannah George – ‘Barbarians at the Gates of Baghdad’, *Foreign Policy*, 21 October 2014, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/10/21/barbarians\\_at\\_the\\_gates\\_of\\_baghdad\\_anbar\\_province\\_isis\\_ir\\_aq](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/10/21/barbarians_at_the_gates_of_baghdad_anbar_province_isis_ir_aq), last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Tirana Hassan – ‘The Gangs of Iraq’, *Foreign Policy*, 3 November 2014, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/11/03/gangs\\_of\\_iraq\\_shiite\\_militia\\_islamic\\_state\\_isis\\_sunni\\_burning](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/11/03/gangs_of_iraq_shiite_militia_islamic_state_isis_sunni_burning) last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>32</sup> *Actions to counter ISIL* Op Cit. Pages 3 and 4.

#### **4) What alternatives are there to the UK Government's current responses and the declared strategy of the international coalition in Iraq and Syria?**

24. We are of the opinion that the only option available to the UK Government is to stay the course.

25. The alternatives to this position are not practicable. Complete military inaction is not an option for the UK Government, although substantial commitment of British ground forces has been rejected for good reason. (These reasons are likely to apply to all but the most extreme operational emergencies: large-scale involvement of Western troops in combat has been seen to create its own hostile cultural reactions amongst local Muslim populations, and pulling out in any way that ISIL could claim as a victory would be counter-productive). Purely diplomatic representation in the region would send a message of British weakness and timidity both to the wider region and the world. Conversely, unilateral action is not an option as the armed forces are not large enough, nor is the UK sufficiently able to resource them. And public support is unlikely to be sustainable for a quixotic level of involvement which exceeded that of other Western nations, especially the US.

26. We counsel against too close an accommodation with the Assad Regime<sup>33</sup> and we judge, likewise, that any accommodation with Iran which has the effect of upsetting the balance in Iraq would be a mistake. That said, we are mindful that a *quid pro quo* might be reached with Iran, combining restraint in the region with nuclear diplomacy. The question of the regional position in a post-ISIL settlement ought to be considered as part of policy now, with a view to delivering a more harmonious balance.

#### **5) Is the UK able to deploy sufficient, sustainable military, diplomatic and other resources to carry out its declared objectives?**

27. It is open to question whether the UK is able to deploy sufficient military, intelligence, diplomatic and other resources on a sustainable basis in Iraq and Syria to carry out its declared objectives. But it will be operating as part of a multi-nation coalition. British decisions must therefore be taken on judgements of the comparative advantage of national resources and the relative gravity of gaps in the coalition's effort.

28. But some possibilities seem apparent. No insurgency has ever been overcome unless it has been overmatched when it has turned to conventional combat, a common example being the Tet Offensive. The defeat of ISIL in the field and its rejection as an organised force, at least from Iraq is therefore a necessary pre-condition for the coalition's success, even though, as we have pointed out, it would not be sufficient in itself. This cannot be left to the Kurds alone and should not have to rely upon the Iranians. The Iraqi Security Forces, especially the Army, will have to be re-motivated to play a major part in this. It will need some re-equipment, but its catastrophic defeats in 2014 resulted from morale, human and command deficiencies. The UK is well placed to help rectify these by assisting in retraining and reorganisation. Provision of British military training and assistance teams should be given a high priority. Language training for them may need to be scaled up. And given the large number of recently retired - or redundant - British troops who have served in Iraq, and have at least some familiarity with local conditions, consideration should be given to a special recruitment scheme to bring back suitable people from civilian life for this specialised purpose.

29. Another particularly important specialisation which may or may not be being adequately addressed at the moment is provision of forward air controllers to ensure that Arab ground troops are optimally supported by air power against an exceptionally fluid and fast moving irregular enemy. US Special Forces are known to be working in this role, but such specialists always tend to be in short supply and the UK should again regard this as a priority - especially if British forward air controllers can work in tandem with

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<sup>33</sup> James Traub – 'Bashar al-Assad and the Devil's Bargain', *Foreign Policy*, 14 November 2014, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/11/14/bashar\\_al\\_assad\\_and\\_the\\_devils\\_bargain\\_syria\\_truce](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/11/14/bashar_al_assad_and_the_devils_bargain_syria_truce), last accessed 28 November 2014.

RAF manned and unmanned ground attack aircraft. This would help further the objectives of minimising civilian casualties from airstrikes, which is not only morally desirable in itself but important for hearts and minds

30. Against any insurgency there are a menu of classical intelligence and black operations possibilities, used in conflicts as far apart as Algeria, Vietnam and Northern Ireland. It is inevitably - and rightly - unclear how far the British government and its Western or regional allies are already taking advantage of such options against ISIL. If suitable operatives can be found, infiltration of ISIL, although exceptionally dangerous, should also be unusually easy, given its pattern of accepting large numbers of foreign volunteers. Once inside the organisation it should not only be possible to provide both strategic and tactical targeting information, but infiltrators can also spread rumours and increase frictions between factions, competing commanders and the populations variously acquiescing in or collaborating with ISIL control. They can also plant falsely compromising information which can lead to paranoia and internecine purges.<sup>34</sup> The UK is often regarded as possessing unusual skills in this little reported area and the large number of British Muslims reported to be heading for Syria could again represent an unconventional resource.

31. It is worth noting that there are regional groupings of friendly states committed to combating ISIL and Al Qaeda affiliates in ungoverned spaces such as Libya and Yemen, far beyond the most reported area of conflict in Syria and Iraq. These efforts are deliberately outside the main anti-ISIL coalition but they may also merit appropriate UK assistance.<sup>35</sup>

32. The argument that circumstances would force intervention upon us<sup>36</sup> has been validated by events, and the resources available to do this are only deployable if the UK Government acts in concert with allies. This is reflected in planning to date and articulated in the latest iterations of both the SDSR and the NSS.

33. As the situation has unfolded, the increasing role of air power has become evident.<sup>37</sup> We are mindful that air power will not defeat ISIL on its own. To date air power has been effective in conjunction with the efforts of allies and co-belligerents on the ground and should be continued. There have been precedents for this type of operation in the past, such as Kosovo, and we judge this to be the best model on which to proceed, at least at the outset of operations.

34. In proceeding, while mindful that Syria is not Libya, we nevertheless view it as imperative to remember the lessons learned about multinational application of modern air power in Libya.<sup>38</sup> The experience of conducting operations in concert with allies was very different in Libya than it has been in Afghanistan and that experience is likely to be relevant to any engagement in Syria. This would especially be the case in the avoidance of the regime's engagement envelope.<sup>39</sup>

35. Other factors, such as air-to-air refueling, the supply of munitions, logistics and the effects of what RAND has termed 'end-to-end support considerations' for the UK's Reaper RPA are particularly relevant

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<sup>34</sup> Clint Watts – 'How About Some Unconventional Warfare? Thoughts on Countering ISIL', War on the Rocks, 20 October 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/10/how-about-some-unconventional-warfare-thoughts-on-countering-isil/>, last accessed 4 December 2014.

<sup>35</sup> World Bulletin/Newsdesk – 'Egypt and Kuwait set up military alliance for Libya and Yemen', *World Bulletin*, 5 November 2014, <http://www.worldbulletin.net/news/147779/egypt-and-kuwait-set-up-military-alliance-for-libya-and-yemen>, last accessed 4 December 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Kemp – 'Options for Intervention', *Syria Crisis Briefing*, RUSI, 25 July 2012, page 5.

<sup>37</sup> See MOD – *LATEST: Air Strikes in Iraq: British forces have continued to conduct air operations to assist the Iraqi government in its fight against ISIL*, First published: 6 October 2014, last updated: 27 November 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/latest-iraq-air-strikes>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>38</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee - *Operations in Libya, Ninth Report of Session 2010–12, Volume I: Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence*, HC 950, 8 February 2012, pages 5 to 66.

<sup>39</sup> Dale E Knutsen – *Strike Warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Naval Institute Press, 2012), pages 15 to 25.

to deployment in the region.<sup>40</sup> These are the main military factors which, in our view, will underpin how sustainable the operation will be. Throughout, it should be remembered that Operations in Libya were of relatively short duration, whereas the current campaign is likely to continue for at several years.<sup>41</sup> It can only be successful if resourced properly.

36. Given the UK's experience of the use of RPA in Afghanistan, their use in Iraq and potentially in Syria is a sustainable option with the advantages over manned aircraft in many, though not all, tactical situations of greater accuracy and discrimination to minimise civilian losses. Although slower moving than fixed wing aircraft, their use does prevent the possibility of British pilots being captured, tortured and executed by ISIL fighters, although the risk of this will remain low unless and until ISIL acquires modern surface-to-air weapons.

37. Providing demanding standards of discrimination to avoid civilian casualties continue to be maintained, we consider the danger of blowback following continuing or additional RPA use to be minimal, as ISIL criticism of their use will effectively be retrospective justification of a position already held. Few, if any, will be minded to join ISIL or conduct operations in the West on that basis alone. The RAF flies RPA with zero expectation of civilian casualties<sup>42</sup> and we welcome the announcement that their position, manifested through the rules of engagement, will remain unchanged.

38. The sustainability of the diplomatic effort is likely to be determined by three things. The first is that its political attractiveness will remain strong due to widespread loathing of ISIL and its barbarous *modus operandi* in the region. Regional Allies are likely to hold the course alongside the UK and others because, however negatively the West is seen, it is not ISIL.

39. The second factor is the importance of wherever possible of being seen to be committed to the effective protection of civilians: R2P. The position of the UK throughout has been one of offering non-lethal and humanitarian aid to democratic opposition in Syria and the recent provision of the same sort of aid to the Yazidis and Kurds in Iraq. The subsequent provision of lethal aid, training and air support has been fully commensurate with that position. As a result, the UK Government will be seen to have adopted a consistent position, though there may be some criticism by regional allies of having 'taken its eye off the ball' and being too slow to act. Nevertheless, the diplomatic position is a strong one.

40. The factor most likely to complicate the diplomatic position is a rush to any alliance of convenience.<sup>43</sup> There has been some commentary in the press suggesting consideration of making arrangements with the Assad Regime and Iran. While these are tempting, we do counsel caution. The reputation the UK Government enjoys abroad is likely to be tainted by such associations and the strategic rewards are not worth the risk to that reputation. The maintenance of a strong line condemning *both* the actions of ISIL and the Syrian Regime is, in our view, essential. At the same time, we encourage the UK Government to do all it can to prevent further direct Iranian involvement in force in Iraq. This can only disrupt the balance *post bellum* and create new difficulties. It may be the case that *pourparlers* on nuclear negotiations might offer a face-saving solution and allow a sustainable diplomatic effort to continue.

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<sup>40</sup> John G Drew, Russell Shaver, Kristin F Lynch, Mahyar A Amouzegar, Don Snyder – *Unmanned Aerial Vehicle End-to-end-Support Considerations*, (RAND, Project Air Force, 2005), pages 19 to 50.

<sup>41</sup> Press TV – 'Ex-Pentagon chief sees 30-year ISIL war, blames Obama: Former CIA director and defense secretary Leon Panetta says the United States should brace for a long battle against the ISIL terrorist group which could take up to 30 years', *Press TV*, 6 October 2014, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/10/06/381255/panetta-isil-war-to-last-30-years/>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Note by the Secretary-General - *Promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism*, UN General Assembly, A/68/389, 18 September 2013, Page 23, [www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a\\_68\\_389.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a_68_389.pdf), last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Traub Op Cit.

## 6) What are the implications of long term involvement in Iraq, Syria and the region for the next NSS and SDSR?

41. The main implication for the next National Security Strategy (NSS) and Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) is that engagement with ISIL is likely to be a long-term commitment and will need to be resourced as such.

42. In the same way that Al-Qaida-influenced radicalisation and terrorism was highlighted at home in the latest iterations of the CONTEST and Prevent Strategies, and overseas in the NSS<sup>44</sup>, the threat posed by ISIL is likely to assume the same proportions in resourcing terms. This is not a threat which will disappear overnight. Domestically, initiatives like Channel<sup>45</sup> are likely to retain their importance in the counter-radicalisation sphere.

43. Likewise, consideration will need to be given to the wider UK Resilience Strategy. If ISIL, perhaps in response to successful coalition operations refocuses itself on attacking Western countries, threats are likely to manifest themselves in at least three main ways. The first could be low-level lethal attacks involving IEDs, VBIEDs and SVBIEDs (improvised explosive devices, vehicle borne improvised explosive devices and suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive devices). Perhaps more likely, given ISIL's desire to distinguish itself from Al Qaeda, its ultraviolent style and its deliberate desire to shock and to place wedges between Muslims and non-Muslims, there could be small-scale assaults and filmed beheadings such as the Woolwich attack<sup>46</sup> or Mumbai-style Fedayeen rampage.<sup>47</sup> Other relevant examples include the recent attack on a Jewish museum in Belgium, where four people were killed<sup>48</sup> and the attack on the Westgate Shopping Centre in Nairobi.<sup>49</sup> Those participating in these are likely to be self-radicalised lone wolves<sup>50</sup> or small groups best understood through the self-starting 'bunch of guys' model.<sup>51</sup>

44. The second set of possibilities could be to use some form of chemical or biological agent against civilians, for instance on the Underground.<sup>52</sup> This is harder to achieve but it would appear that ISIL is prepared to use both methods. It has probably already employed chemicals against the Kurds<sup>53</sup> and is now known to be studying the acquisition of biological weapons<sup>54</sup>. The final (currently identifiable)

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<sup>44</sup> HMG – *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, Command Paper 7953, October 2010, pages 13 and 14 and International Terrorism affecting the UK or its interests, top of Tier 1, page 27.

<sup>45</sup> HMG - *Channel: Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism: A guide for local partnerships*, October 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament - *Report on the intelligence relating to the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby*, HC 795, 25 November 2014

<sup>47</sup> *Prevent* Op Cit. Page 14; *CONTEST* Op Cit. Pages 14, 33, 34 and 93; and B Raman – *Mumbai 26/11: A Day of Infamy* (Lancer, New Delhi, 2009), pages 69 to 94 and 163 to 192; Angel Rabasa, Robert D Blackwill, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, C Christine Fair, Brian A Jackson, Brian Michael Jenkins, Seth G Jones, Nathaniel Shestak and Ashley J Tellis – *The Lessons of Mumbai*, RAND, 2009); and Brian Michael Jenkins – *Terrorists Can Think Strategically: Lessons Learned from the Mumbai Attacks, Testimony presented before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on January 28, 2009*, CT-316, (RAND, January 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Riedel and Olsen Op Cit. Page 3 and BBC News – 'Brussels Jewish Museum killings: Suspect 'admitted attack'', *BBC News*, 1 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-27654505>, last accessed 4 December 2014.

<sup>49</sup> BBC News – 'Nairobi siege: How the attack happened', *BBC News*, 18 October 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24189116>, last accessed 4 December 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Jeffrey D Simon – *Lone Wolf Terrorism* (Prometheus, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> Marc Sageman – *Understanding Terror Networks*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) pages 137 to 184 and Marc Sageman- *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pages 125 to 146.

<sup>52</sup> Eugene Miasnikov - *Threat of Terrorism Using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles: Technical Aspects*, (Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies, Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, 2005), page 7.

<sup>53</sup> Adam Chandler – 'Has ISIS Crossed a New Red Line? Iraq claims the Islamic State used chlorine gas in at least three attacks since the group's summer offensive', *The Atlantic*, 24 October 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/10/iraq-Accuses-isis-Of-chemical-weapons/381920/>, last accessed 4 December 2014.

<sup>54</sup> 'Intelligence has recently discovered that ISIS intends to pursue biological agents and also is trying to figure out how to weaponize bubonic plague through the use of infected animals,' according to Brig. Gen. Maria Gervais, Head of the US Army's Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear School, quoted in Sarah Sicard – 'ISIL

specific new risk to resilience lies in the use of malevolent use of remote piloted aircraft (RPA).<sup>55</sup> These could be armed with small IEDs, grenades, or shotgun cartridges. The question of what would have happened at a recent football match if a harmless flag-carrying RPA<sup>56</sup> had been carrying such a device has been speculated upon in the media, and treatment of the phenomenon has been published by Professor David H Dunn.<sup>57</sup> This risk is complementary to the more general need to reconsider traditional target hardening, entry-point and perimeter defence resilience.<sup>58</sup> It is known that ISIL has already operated RPAs, at least at the reconnaissance role against Syrian forces.<sup>59</sup>

45. These aspects should be addressed in the National Risk Register and this process needs to be commensurate with the recent Blackett Review on High Impact Low Probability events.<sup>60</sup> In light of the latter, there is a strong case for enhancing traditional threat and risk assessment with others relating to technology. This would need to be in addition to the various scenarios posited, and tiered, in the latest iteration of the NSS. With regard to RPA work done by the ICCS, and the recent Birmingham Policy Commission,<sup>61</sup> domestic RPA strategy must be reformulated in light of recent and potential developments.<sup>62</sup>

46. We appreciate that new tiering in the NSS will need to be reflected in the forthcoming SDSR and additional resourcing will be difficult to achieve in the current economic climate. However, we judge enhanced contingency planning to be the minimum response to the potential threat.

## Conclusion

47. In conclusion, the Government has emphasised that successful military action is dependent on an internal political solution in Iraq and a regional solution involving other states. We believe that the conditions are in place and that there is an imperative to take action. The border between Syria and Iraq is porous to the point of non-existence, so involvement in Iraq will have at least some consequences which carry over into Syria.

48. We believe that regular British ground troops should be deployed as a last resort and that as much ground fighting as possible should be carried out by local allies and co-belligerents. Trainers and Special Forces would be required on the ground throughout. Opportunities for intelligence and unconventional operations may be exceptionally favourable. In the air, the UK should use the optimum airpower mix, including RPAs, without special restriction.

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Determined to Acquire Biological Weapons (UPDATED)', *National Defense* blog, 10 July 2014, <http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/blog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=1632>, last accessed 4 December 2014.

<sup>55</sup> David H. Dunn - 'Drones: Disembodied Aerial Warfare and the Unarticulated Threat', *International Affairs*, Volume 89, Number 5.

<sup>56</sup> BBC - 'Serbia condemns drone flag stunt at Albania match', *BBC News*, 15 October 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-29627615>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>57</sup> Dunn Op Cit.

<sup>58</sup> HM Government - *Protecting Crowded Places: Design and Technical Issues*, (London: Home Office, Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure and the National Counter-Terrorism Security Office, March 2014), pages 10-13 and Annex B: 'Typical counter-terrorism design attributes – design of hostile vehicle mitigation measures', pages 27-32.

<sup>59</sup> Yasmin Tadjeh - 'Islamic State Militants in Syria Now Have Drone Capabilities', *National Defense Magazine*, 28 August, 2014, [www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/blog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=1586](http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/blog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=1586), last accessed 4 December 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Government Office for Science - *High impact low probability risks: Blackett review*, Government Office for Science, 13 January 2012, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-impact-low-probability-risks-blackett-review>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>61</sup> Birmingham Policy Commission VI Report - *The Security Impact of Drones*, October 2014, <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/conflict-cooperation-security/Projects/Unmanned-Aerial-Vehicles/BIRMINGHAM-POLICY-COMMISSION-VI-THE-SECURITY-IMPACT-OF-DRONES.aspx>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Tom Watson - *Early day motion 487: Proposal for UK Policy on Drone Use*, Session: 2014-15, Date tabled: 06.11.2014, <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2014-15/487>, last accessed 28 November 2014.

49. Current UK military operations are sustainable in the long term with sensible measures being taken to minimise the footprint on the ground and care taken to avoid unnecessary losses. Working with coalition partners, especially the US, will generate many of the synergies needed for sustained operations.

50. Coalition activity against ISIL will also complicate the humanitarian situation in some areas but it is important to consider that the effects of blurring the civilian and the military - often encountered in UK and allied Counterinsurgency doctrine - should be avoided. Otherwise, the distribution of aid could appear partisan and communal, rather than humanitarian.

51. Finally, we reiterate the obvious need for all Government Departments to co-ordinate their efforts to deal with the threat posed by ISIL and for all policy to be updated and internationally co-ordinated.

Honorary Professor Paul Schulte, Professor Stefan Wolff and Dr Christopher M Wyatt  
4 December 2014