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**House of Commons**

***Wednesday 2 December 2015***

***The House met at half-past Eleven o’clock***

**PRAYERS**

**[Mr Speaker*in the Chair*]**

**Mr Speaker:** Before I look to the Leader of the House to move the business of the House motion—that is to say, motion No. 1—it might be for the convenience of the House to know that no fewer than 157 colleagues are seeking to catch the eye of the Chair today. The Chair will do his best to accommodate as many colleagues as possible. I would ask that colleagues please do not come to the Chair to inquire whether they are going to be called and, if so, when, or to inquire on behalf of a colleague, or to cause others to inquire on their behalf or that of others. I understand the interest. We have done our best and will do our best. Please be patient and hope for the best. Needless to say, but for the benefit particularly of new Members: bear in mind that if you do wish to speak, it is imperative that you remain until all of the Front-Bench speeches have been completed. Thereafter, people must use their own judgment and come and go if they wish, but try to remain in the Chamber for as much of the debate as possible.

**Business of the House**

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That at this day’s sitting, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to ISIL in Syria (United Nations Security Council Resolution 2249) not later than 10pm; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—*(Chris Grayling.)*

**11.36 am**

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** We shall be dealing today with the security of our country, the safety of the people of Syria and the lives of our armed forces, which is why we asked two weeks ago for a two-day debate—a request my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) repeated on Monday—so that Members had a chance to make proper contributions and to reflect on the arguments between the two days. As you have just said, Mr Speaker, 157 Members have put in to speak—87 Opposition Members and 70 Government

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Members—in addition to the Front-Bench speeches, during which right hon. and hon. Members will undoubtedly want to press Ministers on their argument and on their case. I gather that you will be announcing soon that there will be a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, and that will almost certainly be reduced to four and three minutes. Even so, not all Members will be able to speak in the debate today. I gently say to the Prime Minister that this is no way to proceed if he really wants to take the House and the country with him.

**11.37 am**

**Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP):** It is very important that we on the Scottish National party Benches put forward our profound disappointment at this guillotine motion, following the rejection of all the calls and requests for a two-day debate. Tomorrow’s business could so easily have been postponed. The public expect us to clear the decks and get down to debating the important issues of the day. It is very likely, given that almost a quarter of the Members of this House want to speak today, that some will be disappointed. Every Member of Parliament has the right to represent their constituents on an issue of such importance, and our constituents have the right to listen to their MPs. This is no way to do business and we remain very disappointed that the Government have not listened to the calls for more time for this debate.

**11.38 am**

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling):** I want simply to say that, since 157 people are waiting to speak, it would be much better if we got on with the debate.

**Mr Speaker:** I will not be making any announcements soon about any time limit, and I have given absolutely no hon. or right hon. Member any reason to believe that I shall. If I have something to say, I will say it to the House.

**Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There is an error on the Order Paper: my name has erroneously been added to an amendment.

**Mr Speaker:** I am very grateful to the hon. Lady. Her name was apparently inadvertently added to an amendment. I believe that she has indicated the desire for her name to be withdrawn from that amendment, and that is noted. Perhaps, if she would be kind enough, we can leave it there.

*Question put and agreed to.*

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**ISIL in Syria**

*[Relevant documents: The Second Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, on The extension of offensive British military operations to Syria, HC 457, and the Prime Minister’s response, published on the internet on 26 November; the Seventh Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2014-15, on The situation in Iraq and Syria and the response to al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq al-Sham (DAESH), HC 690, and the Government's response, Twelfth Special Report, Session 2014-15, HC 1126; and oral evidence taken before the Defence Committee on 1 December 2015, UK military operations in Syria and Iraq, HC 657.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Before I call the Prime Minister to move the motion, I should inform the House that I have selected amendment (b) in the name of Mr John Baron and others. The amendment will be debated together with the main motion. At the end of the debate, Mr Baron will be invited to move the amendment formally and the questions will then be put, first on the amendment and then on the main motion.

**11.40 am**

**The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):** I beg to move,

That this House notes that ISIL poses a direct threat to the United Kingdom; welcomes United Nations Security Council Resolution 2249 which determines that ISIL constitutes an ‘unprecedented threat to international peace and security’ and calls on states to take ‘all necessary measures’ to prevent terrorist acts by ISIL and to ‘eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria’; further notes the clear legal basis to defend the UK and our allies in accordance with the UN Charter; notes that military action against ISIL is only one component of a broader strategy to bring peace and stability to Syria; welcomes the renewed impetus behind the Vienna talks on a ceasefire and political settlement; welcomes the Government’s continuing commitment to providing humanitarian support to Syrian refugees; underlines the importance of planning for post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction in Syria; welcomes the Government’s continued determination to cut ISIL’s sources of finance, fighters and weapons; notes the requests from France, the US and regional allies for UK military assistance; acknowledges the importance of seeking to avoid civilian casualties, using the UK’s particular capabilities; notes the Government will not deploy UK troops in ground combat operations; welcomes the Government’s commitment to provide quarterly progress reports to the House; and accordingly supports Her Majesty’s Government in taking military action, specifically airstrikes, exclusively against ISIL in Syria; and offers its wholehearted support to Her Majesty’s Armed Forces.

The question before the House today is how we keep the British people safe from the threat posed by ISIL. Let me be clear from the outset that this is not about whether we want to fight terrorism but about how best we do that. I respect that Governments of all political colours in this country have had to fight terrorism and have had to take the people with them as they do so. I respect people who come to a different view from the Government and from the one that I will set out today, and those who vote accordingly. I hope that that provides some reassurance to Members across the House.

**Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab):** I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. He is right to say in his opening statement how important it is to respect opinion on all sides of the House, so will he apologise for the remarks he made in a meeting last night against my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Labour Benches?

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**The Prime Minister:** I could not have been clearer in my opening remarks: I respect people who disagree; I respect the fact that Governments of all colours have had to fight terrorism; and I respect the fact that we are all discussing how to fight terrorism, not whether to fight terrorism.

In moving this motion, I am not pretending—

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** I shall make some progress—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Prime Minister is clearly not giving way at this stage. He has the floor.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, I will take dozens of interventions in the time that I have. I am conscious of not taking up too much time as so many people want to speak, but I promise that I will give way a lot during my speech. Let me make a bit of progress at the start.

In moving this motion, I am not pretending that the answers are simple. The situation in Syria is incredibly complex. I am not overstating the contribution our incredible servicemen and women can make; nor am I ignoring the risks of military action or pretending that military action is any more than one part of the answer. I am absolutely clear that we must pursue a comprehensive strategy that also includes political, diplomatic and humanitarian action, and I know that the long-term solution in Syria—as in Iraq—must ultimately be a Government that represents all of its people and one that can work with us to defeat the evil organisation of ISIL for good.

**Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP):** Will the Prime Minister give way?

**The Prime Minister:** In a moment.

Notwithstanding all of that, there is a simple question at the heart of the debate today. We face a fundamental threat to our security. ISIL has brutally murdered British hostages. They have inspired the worst terrorist attack against British people since 7/7 on the beaches of Tunisia, and they have plotted atrocities on the streets here at home. Since November last year our security services have foiled no fewer than seven different plots against our people, so this threat is very real. The question is this: do we work with our allies to degrade and destroy this threat, and do we go after these terrorists in their heartlands, from where they are plotting to kill British people, or do we sit back and wait for them to attack us?

**John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op):** It would be helpful if the Prime Minister could retract his inappropriate comments from last night, but will he be reassured that no one on the Labour Benches will make a decision based on any such remarks, or be threatened and not do what we believe is the right thing—whether those threats come from online activists or, indeed, from our own Dispatch Box?

**The Prime Minister:** I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Everyone in this House should make up their mind based on the arguments in this House. There is honour in voting for; there is honour in voting

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against. That is the way the House should operate, and that is why I wanted to be absolutely clear, at the start of my speech, that this is about how we fight terrorism, not whether we fight it.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** I will make some progress, and then I will give way.

In answering this question, we should remember that 15 months ago, facing a threat from ISIL in Iraq, the House voted 524 to 43 to authorise airstrikes in Iraq. Since then, our brilliant RAF pilots have helped local forces to halt ISIL’s advance and recover 30% of the territory ISIL had captured. On Monday, I spoke to the President of Iraq in Paris, and he expressed his gratitude for the vital work our forces were doing. Yet, when our planes reach the Syrian border—a border that ISIL itself does not recognise—we can no longer act to defend either his country or ours, even though ISIL’s headquarters are in Raqqa in Syria and it is from there that many of the plots against our country are formed.

**Alex Salmond:** The Prime Minister is facing an amendment signed by 110 Members from six different political parties. I have examined that list very carefully, and I cannot identify a single terrorist sympathiser among them. Will he now apologise for his deeply insulting remarks?

**The Prime Minister:** I have made it clear that this is about how we fight terrorism, and that there is honour in any vote.

We possess the capabilities to reduce this threat to our security, and my argument today is that we should not wait any longer before doing so. We should answer the call from our allies. The action we propose is legal, necessary and the right thing to do to keep our country safe. My strong view is that the House should make it clear that we will take up our responsibilities, rather than pass them off and put our own national security in the hands of others.

**Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con):** I have just returned from Baghdad and Irbil, where ISIL is on the back foot. Ramadi is surrounded, Sinjar has been liberated and the route between Mosul and Raqqa has been cut off, but everyone on the ground tells me that unless we attack ISIL in Syria, there is no point liberating Mosul or the rest of Iraq, because all ISIL will do is regroup in Syria and come back to attack that country and our country.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The UN Security Council has set out very clearly that the fact that this so-called caliphate exists in Syria as well as Iraq is a direct threat to Iraq and its Government. He talks about some of the better news from Iraq. I would add to that what has happened in Tikrit since that has been taken from ISIL. We have seen 70% of its population return. I am sure we will talk later in this debate about the importance of humanitarian aid and reconstruction. That can work only with good government in those towns and in the absence of ISIL/Daesh.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

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**The Prime Minister:** I will make a little more progress and then take some more interventions from the different political parties.

Since my statement last week, the House has had an opportunity to ask questions of our security experts. I have arranged a briefing for all Members, as well as more detailed briefings for Privy Counsellors. I have spoken further to our allies, including President Obama, Chancellor Merkel, President Hollande and the King of Jordan, the last of whom has written in *The Daily Telegraph* today expressing his wish for Britain to stand with Jordan in eliminating this global threat.

I have also listened carefully to the questions asked by Members on both sides of the House, and I hope that hon. Members can see the influence that the House has had on the motion before us: the stress on post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction; the importance of standing by our allies; the importance of only targeting ISIL and not deploying ground troops in combat operations; the need to avoid civilian casualties; the importance of ceasefires and a political settlement; and the commitment to regular updates to the House. I have drawn these points from across the House and put them in the motion, because I want as many people as possible to feel able to support this action.

**Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD):** First, may I say that I will be supporting the Prime Minister today, although I think he needs to apologise for his comments about the Labour party? May I also ask him what the UK Government will do to minimise the number of civilian casualties?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. In Iraq, for a year and three months there have been no reports of civilian casualties related to the strikes that Britain has taken. Our starting point is to avoid civilian casualties altogether, and I have argued, and will indeed do so again today, that our precision weapons and the skill of our pilots make civilian casualties less likely. So Britain being involved in the strikes in Iraq can both be effective in prosecuting the campaign against ISIL and help us to avoid civilian casualties.

**Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab):** Is the Prime Minister aware of press reports that in the recent past 60,000 Syrian troops have been murdered by ISIL and our allies have waited until after those murderous acts have taken place to attack? Therefore, a key part of the motion for many of us is the reference to our action being “exclusively against ISIL”. If ISIL is involved in attacking Syrian Government troops, will we be bombing ISIL in defence of those troops, or will we wait idly by, as our allies have done up to now, for ISIL to kill those troops, and then bomb?

**The Prime Minister:** What I say to the right hon. Gentleman, for whom I have great respect, is that the motion says “exclusively” ISIL because that was a promise I made in this House in response to points made from both sides of the House. As far as I am concerned, wherever members of ISIL are, wherever they can be properly targeted, that is what we should do. Let me just make this point, because I think it is important when we come to the argument about ground troops. In my discussions with the King of Jordan, he made the point that in the south of Syria there is already not only

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co-operation among the Jordanian Government, the French and the Americans, and the Free Syrian Army, but a growing ceasefire between the regime troops and the Free Syrian Army so that they can turn their guns on ISIL. That is what I have said: this is an ISIL-first strategy. They are the threat. They are the ones we should be targeting. This is about our national security.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make a little progress and then I will take more interventions. In my remarks, I want to address the most important points that are being raised, and I will of course take as many interventions as I can.

I believe the key questions that have been raised are these: first, could acting in this way actually increase the risk to our security by making an attack on Britain more likely? Secondly, does Britain really have the capability to make a significant difference? Thirdly—this is the question asked by a number of Members, including the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond)—why do we not just increase our level of airstrikes in Iraq to free up capacity among other members of the coalition so that they can carry out more airstrikes in Syria? Fourthly, will there really be the ground forces needed to make this operation a success? Fifthly, what is the strategy for defeating ISIL and securing a lasting political settlement in Syria? Sixthly, is there a proper reconstruction and post-conflict stabilisation plan for Syria? I want to try, in the time I have available, to answer all of those in turn.

**Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP):** The Prime Minister will know how members of my party feel when it comes to fighting and dealing with terrorism, and for that there will always be support, no matter where terrorism raises its head. The motion states that

“the Government will not deploy UK troops in ground combat operations”.

If it becomes necessary at a later date to do that, will he guarantee that he will come back to this House to seek approval for that?

**The Prime Minister:** This is something not only that I do not want to do, but that I think would be a mistake if we did it. The argument was made to us by the Iraqi Government that the presence of western ground troops can be a radicalising force and can be counterproductive, and that is our view. I would say to the hon. Gentleman, and to colleagues behind me who are concerned about this issue, that I accept that this means that our strategy takes longer to be successful, because we rely on Iraqi ground troops in Iraq, we rely on the patchwork of Free Syrian Army troops in Syria, and in time we hope for Syrian ground troops from a transitional regime. All of that takes longer, and one of the clear messages that has to come across today is that, yes, we do have a strategy, and although it is a complex picture and it will take time, we are acting in the right way.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make one more point before I take some more interventions, because I want to say a word about the terminology we use to describe this evil death cult.Having carefully considered the strong

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representation made to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) and having listened to many Members of Parliament across the House, I feel that it is time to join our key ally, France, the Arab League, and other members of the international community in using, as frequently as possible, the terminology “Daesh” rather than ISIL. This evil death cult is neither a true representation of Islam nor a state.

**Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab):** I am very interested to hear what the right hon. Gentleman says about what name we should call Daesh. If we are talking about terminology, should he not take this opportunity to withdraw the names that he is calling those who will not be voting with him tonight? Not only is it offensive to use the words “a bunch of terrorist sympathisers”, but it is dangerous and untrue.

**The Prime Minister:** I have made my views clear about the importance of all of us fighting terrorism, and I think that it is time to move on.

**Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op)** *rose—*

**Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab)** *rose—*

**The Prime Minister:** Let me turn to the important questions, and I will take interventions as I go through them.

First, could acting increase the risk to our security? That is one of the most important questions that we have to answer. Privy Counsellors across the House have had a briefing from the Chair of the independent Joint Intelligence Committee. Obviously, I cannot share all the classified material, but I can say this: Paris was different not just because it was so close to us or because it was so horrific in scale, but because it showed the extent of terror planning from Daesh in Syria and the approach of sending people back from Syria to Europe. This was the head of the snake in Raqqa in action, so it is not surprising that the judgment of the Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee and of the director general of the Security Service is that the risk of a similar attack in the UK is real, and that the UK is already in the top tier of countries on ISIL’s target list.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** I want to make this point and then I will take some more interventions.

If there is an attack on the UK in the coming weeks or months, there will be those who try to say that it has happened because of our airstrikes. I do not believe that that will be the case. Daesh has been trying to attack us for the past year, as we know from the seven different plots that our security services have foiled. In the light of that threat from Daesh, the terrorist threat to the UK was raised to severe last August, which means that an attack is highly likely.

**Albert Owen** *rose—*

**Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)** *rose—*

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**Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)** *rose—*

**The Prime Minister:** I will give way in two minutes. Some 800 people, including families and children, have been radicalised to such an extent that they have travelled to this so-called caliphate. The House should be under no illusion: these terrorists are plotting to kill us and to radicalise our children right now. They attack us because of who we are, and not because of what we do.

**John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP):** All of us on the Opposition Benches share the Prime Minister’s horror of Daesh and its death cult and abhor terrorism. Will he take this further opportunity to identify which Members on these Benches he regards as terrorist sympathisers?

**The Prime Minister:** Everyone in this House can speak for themselves. What I am saying is that, when it comes to the risks of military action, the risks of inaction are far greater than the risks of what I propose.

Next there are those who ask whether Britain conducting strikes in Syria will really make a difference.

**Albert Owen:** On that point—

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make my argument, and then I will take the hon. Gentleman’s question.

This point has been raised in briefing after briefing. I believe that we can make a real difference. I told the House last week about our dynamic targeting, our Brimstone missiles, the Raptor pod on our Tornados and the intelligence-gathering work of our Reaper drones. I will not repeat all that today, but there is another way of putting this, which is equally powerful. There is a lot of strike capacity in the coalition, but when it comes to precision-strike capability whether covering Iraq or Syria, let me say this: last week, the whole international coalition had some 26 aircraft available, eight of which were British tornadoes. Typically, the UK actually represents between a quarter and a third of the international coalition’s precision bombing capability. We also have about a quarter of the unmanned strike capability flying in the region. Therefore, we have a significant proportion of high-precision strike capability, which is why this decision is so important.

**Albert Owen** *rose—*

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman has been very persistent, so I will give way.

**Albert Owen:** The Prime Minister is right to sing the praises of the RAF pilots. The son of my constituent, Mike Poole, was tragically killed in a Tornado, in 2012, while training for the RAF. Mike Poole has specifically asked me this question: does the Air Force have coalition warning systems to deal with the crowded airspace in northern Iraq and in Syria, if we make that decision today? Such a system is absolutely essential for the safety of our pilots.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this issue, and I pay tribute to his constituent’s son. We will be part of the de-confliction process that already exists between those coalition partners flying in

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Syria and the Russians. Of course, our own aeroplanes have the most advanced defensive air suites possible to make sure that they are kept safe. The argument that I was making is one reason why members of the international coalition, including President Obama and President Hollande, who made these points to me personally, believe that British planes would make a real difference in Syria, just as they are already doing in Iraq.

**Ian Blackford:** I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. It is important in this debate that there is respect across the House. In that spirit of respect, he must—he has been asked before—apologise for the slur that was put on every Opposition Member last night. He should do it now, and let us have a proper debate.

**The Prime Minister:** We are going to vote either way tonight—either vote is an honourable vote. I suggest that we get on with the debate that the country wants to hear.

In many ways, what I have just said helps to answer the next question that some Members have asked about why we do not simply increase our level of airstrikes in Iraq to free up coalition capacity for strikes in Syria. We have the capabilities that other members of the Coalition want to benefit from, and it makes absolutely no sense to stop using these capabilities at a border between Iraq and Syria that Daesh simply does not recognise or respect.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make this argument, because it is an important, detailed point. There was a recent incident in which Syrian opposition forces needed urgent support in their fight against Daesh. British Tornadoes were eight minutes away, just over the border in Iraq—no one else was close—but Britain could not help, so the Syrian opposition forces had to wait 40 minutes in a perilous situation while other coalition forces were scrambled. That sort of delay endangers the lives of those fighting Daesh on the ground, and does nothing for our reputation with our vital allies.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** Let me give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron)

**Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con):** I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. Does he understand that at a time when too many aircraft are already chasing too few targets, many of us are concerned about the lack of a comprehensive strategy, both military and non-military, including an exit strategy? One of the fundamental differences between Iraq and Syria is that in Iraq there are nearly 1 million personnel on the Government payroll, and still we are having trouble pushing ISIL back. In Syria, with the 70,000 moderates, we risk forgetting the lesson of Libya. What is the Prime Minister’s reaction to the decision yesterday by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs that he had not adequately addressed our concerns?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me answer both of my hon. Friend’s questions. The second question is perhaps answered

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with something in which I am sure the whole House will want to join me in, which is wishing the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) well, given his recent illness. He is normally always at the Foreign Affairs Committee, and always voting on non-party grounds on the basis of the arguments in which he believes.

Where my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay and I disagree is on this: I believe that there is a strategy, of which military action is only one part. The key answer to his question is that we want to see a new Syrian transitional Government whose troops will then be our allies in squeezing out and destroying the so-called caliphate altogether. My disagreement with my hon. Friend is that I believe that we cannot wait for that happen. The threat is now; ISIL/Daesh is planning attacks now. We can act in Syria as we act in Iraq, and in doing so, we can enhance the long-term security and safety of our country, which is why we should act.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** Let me give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti).

**Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con):** May I first of all thank the Prime Minister for that change in terminology, and all Members of Parliament across the House for their support? Will the Prime Minister join me in urging the BBC to review its bizarre policy? It wrote to me to say that it cannot use the word “Daesh” because it would breach its impartiality rules. We are at war with terrorists, and we have to defeat their ideology and appeal: we have to be united. Will he join me in urging the BBC to review its bizarre policy?

**The Prime Minister:** I agree with my hon. Friend, and I have already corresponded with the BBC about its use of “IS”—Islamic State—which I think is even worse than either saying “so-called IS” or, indeed, “ISIL”. “Daesh” is clearly an improvement, and it is important that we all try and use this language.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make some progress, then I will give way again.

There is a much more fundamental answer as to why we should carry out airstrikes in Syria ourselves, and it is this. Raqqa in Syria is the headquarters of this threat to our security. It is in Syria where they pump and sell the oil that does so much to help finance its evil acts, and as I have said, it is in Syria where many of the plots against our country are formed, so we must act in Syria to deal with these threats ourselves.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** I will give way to the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty).

**Stephen Doughty:** I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. I would have preferred to hear an apology, but I want to discuss the facts. The fact is that we are

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proposing to target very different things from those that we are targeting in northern Iraq and I would like to ask the Prime Minister two questions. First, what practical steps will be used to reduce civilian casualties? Secondly, what sorts of targets will we be going against that will reduce the terrorist threat to the UK in terms of operations directed against our citizens?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me answer the hon. Gentleman very directly. On the sorts of targets that we can go after, clearly it is the leaders of this death cult itself, the training camps, the communications hubs and those who are plotting against us. As I shall argue in a minute, the limited action that we took against Khan and Hussain, which was, if you like, an airstrikes on Syria, has already had an impact on ISIL—on Daesh. That is a very important point.

How do we avoid civilian casualties? We have a policy—a start point—of wanting zero civilian casualties. One year and three months into those Iraqi operations, we have not had any reports of civilian casualties. I am not saying that there are no casualties in war; of course there are. We are putting ourselves into a very difficult situation, which is hugely complex. In many ways it is a difficult argument to get across, but its heart is a simple point—will we be safer and better off in the long term if we can get rid of the so-called caliphate which is radicalising Muslims, turning people against us and plotting atrocities on the streets of Britain?

**Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are already hundreds, if not thousands, of civilian casualties—those who are thrown off buildings, burned, decapitated, crucified, and those who have had to flee Syria, away from their co-religionists who have so bastardised that religion? Those are the civilian casualties we are trying to help.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend puts it extremely clearly. That is one of the aims of what we are doing—to prevent this death cult from carrying out the ghastly acts it carries out daily.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make some progress. Let me turn to the question of whether there will be ground forces to make this operation a success. Those who say that there are not as any ground troops as we would like, and that they are not all in the right places, are correct. We are not dealing with an ideal situation, but let me make a series of important points. First, we should be clear what airstrikes alone can achieve. We do not need ground troops to target the supply of oil which Daesh uses to fund terrorism. We do not need ground troops to hit Daesh’s headquarters, its infrastructure, its supply routes, its training facilities and its weapons supplies. It is clear that airstrikes can have an effect, as in the case of Khan and Hussain that I just mentioned. Irrespective of ground forces, our RAF can do serious damage to Daesh’s ability right now to bring terror to our streets and we should give it that support.

**George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP):** How would the Prime Minister respond to the point that since Daesh’s offensive against Baghdad was blunted by air power, it has changed its tactics and dispersed its forces,

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and particularly in Raqqa, a town of 600,000 people at present, has dispersed its operations all through that city into small units which make it impervious to attacks from our Tornados, given the small number of Tornados we have?

**The Prime Minister:** What the hon. Gentleman says is right. Of course Daesh has changed its tactics from the early days when airstrikes were even more effective, but that is not an argument for doing nothing. It is an argument for using airstrikes where we can, but having a longer-term strategy to deliver the necessary ground troops through the transition. The argument before the House is simple: do we wait for perfection, which is a transitional Government in Syria, or do we start the work now of degrading and destroying that organisation at the request of our allies, at the request of the Gulf states, in the knowledge from our security experts that it will make a difference?

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make a little progress, then I will take interventions from both sides.

As I said last week, the full answer to the question of ground forces cannot be achieved until there is a new Syrian Government who represent all the Syrian people—not just Sunni, Shi’a and Alawite, but Christian, Druze and others. It is this new Government who will be the natural partners for our forces in defeating Daesh for good. But there are some ground forces that we can work with in the meantime. Last week I told the House—

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** Let me give the explanation, and then colleagues can intervene if they like.

Last week I told the House that we believe that there are around 70,000 Syrian opposition fighters who do not belong to extremist groups and with whom we can co-ordinate attacks on Daesh. The House will appreciate that there are some limits on what I can say about these groups, not least because I cannot risk the safety of these courageous people, who are being targeted daily by the regime, by Daesh or by both. But I know that this is an area of great interest and concern to the House, so let me try to say a little more.

The 70,000 figure is an estimate from our independent Joint Intelligence Committee, based on detailed analysis, updated daily and drawing on a wide range of open sources and intelligence. The majority of the 70,000 are from the Free Syrian Army. Alongside the 70,000, there are some 20,000 Kurdish fighters with whom we can also work. I am not arguing—this is a crucial point—that all of the 70,000 are somehow ideal partners. However, some left the Syrian army because of Assad’s brutality, and clearly they can play a role in the future of Syria. That view is also taken by the Russians, who are prepared to talk with these people.

**Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con):** I thank the Prime Minister for giving way, and for the helpful way he is explaining matters to colleagues across the House. He spoke about a long-term strategy to see a new Government in Syria. There is wide agreement on that among our allies, but possibly more of a challenge with Russia. What conversations has he had with President Putin,

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either directly or via the United States, on the short and longer-term prospects for President Assad?

**The Prime Minister:** I have had those conversations with President Putin on many occasions, most recently at the G20 summit in Antalya, and President Obama had a meeting with him at the climate change conference in Paris. As I have said before in this House, there was an enormous gap between Britain, America, France and, indeed, Saudi Arabia on the one hand and Russia on the other hand; we wanted Assad to go instantly and they wanted him to stay, potentially forever. That gap has narrowed, and I think that it will narrow further as the vital talks in Vienna get under way.

Let me make a point about the Vienna talks, because I think that some people worry that it is a process without an end. The clear ambition in the talks is to see a transitional Government within six months, and a new constitution and fresh elections within 18 months, so there is real momentum behind them.

**Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con):** Will the Prime Minister confirm that, alongside any military intervention in Syria that the House might authorise tonight, he remains completely committed to the Government’s huge humanitarian effort, which has kept so many people alive in the region?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I can certainly confirm that. We are the second largest bilateral donor in the world, after America, and we will keep that up, not least with the vital conference that we are co-chairing in London next year, when we will bring together the whole world to ensure that we fill the gap in the funding that is available.

**Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab):** I am grateful to the Prime Minister, who is presenting his case well. Had he come to the House and asked for a very narrow licence to take out ISIL’s external planning capability, I think that would have commanded widespread consent, but he is asking for a wider authority. I want to draw him on the difference between Iraq and Syria. In Iraq there are ground forces in place, but in Syria there are not. I invite him to say a little more at the very least about what ground forces he envisages joining us in the seizure of Raqqa.

**The Prime Minister:** Let me try to answer that as directly as possible, because it goes to the nub of the difficulty of this case. I do not think that we can separate the task of taking out the command and control of Daesh’s operations against the UK, France, Belgium and elsewhere from the task of degrading and destroying the so-called caliphate that it has created; the two are intricately linked. Indeed, as I argued before the House last week, as long as the so-called caliphate exists, it is a threat to us, not least because it is radicalising Muslims from around the world who are going to fight for that organisation and potentially then return to attack us.

On the right hon. Gentleman’s second question about ground troops, as I have explained, there are three parts to the argument. First, we must not underestimate the things we can do without ground troops. Secondly, although the ground troops that are there are not ideal

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and there are not as many of them as we would like, they are people we are working with and who we can work with more. Thirdly, the real plan is that as we get a transitional Government in Syria that can represent all the Syrian people, there will be more ground troops for us to work with to defeat Daesh and the caliphate, which will keep our country safe. I know that will take a long time and that it will be complex, but that is the strategy, and we need to start with the first step, which is going after these terrorists today.

**Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab):** I think the Prime Minister has to acknowledge that the ground troops that we can work with will be absolutely essential for his long-term strategy. At the moment he has not shown to me that as we defeat ISIL, we will not simply create a vacuum into which Assad will move and we will be fighting another enemy. Just a final word—perhaps I give him some motherly advice—if he got up now and said, “Whoever does not walk with me through the Division Lobby is not a terrorist sympathiser”, he would improve his standing in this House enormously.

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to repeat what the hon. Lady said. As I have said, people who vote in either Division Lobby do so with honour. I could not have been clearer about that. If she is saying that there are not enough ground troops, she is right. If she is saying that they are not always in the right places, she is right. But the question for us is, should we act now in order to try to start to turn the tide?

**Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP)** *rose—*

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make some progress, but I will certainly give way to the leader of the SNP in a moment. I just want to be clear about the 70,000. That figure does not include a further 25,000 extremist fighters in groups which reject political participation and reject co-ordination with non-Muslims, so although they fight Daesh they cannot and will not be our partners. So there are ground forces who will take the fight to Daesh, and in many cases we can work with them and we can assist them.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** I want to make one final point and then I will give way to the leader of the SNP.

If we do not act now, we should be clear that there will be even fewer ground forces over time as Daesh will get even stronger. In my view, we simply cannot afford to wait. We have to act now.

**Angus Robertson:** Would the Prime Minister clarify for every Member of the House the advice that he and others have been given in relation to the 70,000 forces that he speaks of? How many of those 70,000 are classified as moderate and how many of them are classified as fundamentalists with whom we can never work?

**The Prime Minister:** On the 70,000, the advice I have is that the majority are made up of the Free Syrian Army, but of course the Free Syrian Army has different leadership in different parts of the country. The 70,000 excludes those in extremist groups like al-Nusra that we

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will not work with. As I have said very clearly, I am not arguing that the 70,000 are ideal partners; some of them do have views that we do not agree with. But the definition of the 70,000 is those people that we have been prepared to work with and continue to be prepared to work with. Let me make this point again: if we do not take action against Daesh now, the number of ground forces we can work with will get less and less and less. If we want to end up with a situation where there is the butcher Assad on one side and a stronger ISIL on the other side, not acting is one of the things that will bring that about.

**Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con):** I know from my time in government how long, how hard and how anxiously the Prime Minister thinks about these questions, but will he ensure that we complete the military aspect of this campaign, if at all possible, so that we can then get on to the really important, but perhaps the most difficult aspect of the questions that he has posed—namely, the post-conflict stabilisation and the reconstruction of Syria, because without this early stage there will not be a Syria left to reconstruct?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. and learned Friend, who himself always thought about these things very carefully, is right. That is the end goal, and we should not take our eyes off the prize, which is a reconstructed Syria with a Government that can represent all the people; which is a Syria at peace so that we do not have the migration crisis and we do not have the terrorism crisis. That is the goal.

Let me turn to the overall strategy. Again, I set this out in the House last week.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** I will make some progress.

Let me say a little more about each of the non-military elements: counter-terrorism, counter-extremism, the political and diplomatic processes, and the vital humanitarian work that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier) just referred to. Our counter-terrorism strategy gives Britain a comprehensive plan to prevent and foil plots at home and also to address the poisonous extremist ideology that is the root cause of the threat that we face. As part of this, I can announce today that we will establish a comprehensive review to root out any remaining funding of extremism within the UK. This will examine specifically the nature, scale and origin of the funding of Islamist extremist activity in the UK, including any overseas sources. It will report to myself and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary next spring.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** I want to make this point before I give way again. I know there are some who suggest that military action could in some way undermine our counter-extremism strategy by radicalising British Muslims, so let me take this head on. British Muslims are appalled by Daesh. These women-raping, Muslim-murdering, medieval monsters are hijacking the peaceful religion of Islam for their warped ends. As the King of Jordan says in an article today, these people are not Muslims, they are “outlaws” from Islam. We must stand with our Muslim friends, here and around the world, as they

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reclaim their religion from these terrorists. Far from an attack on Islam, we are engaged in a defence of Islam, and far from a risk of radicalising British Muslims by acting, failing to act would actually be to betray British Muslims and the wider religion of Islam in its very hour of need.

**Mr Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) (Lab):** The Prime Minister said that this country would fight all the time. Why do the Iranians, the Saudis and the Turks not fight these people? Why has it always got to be us who fight them?

**The Prime Minister:** The Turks are taking part in this action and urging us to do the same. The Saudis are taking part in this action and urging us to do the same. The Jordanians have taken part in this action and urge us to do the same. I have in my notes quote after quote from leader after leader in the Gulf world begging and pleading with Britain to take part so that we can take the fight to this death cult that threatens us all so much.

The second part of our strategy is our support for the diplomatic and political process. Let me say a word about how this process can lead to the ceasefires between the regime and the opposition that are so essential for the next stages of this political transition. It begins with identifying the right people to put around the table. Next week, we expect the Syrian regime to nominate a team of people to negotiate under the auspices of the United Nations. Over the last 18 months, political and armed opposition positions have converged. We know the main groups and their ideas. In the coming days, Saudi Arabia will host an inclusive meeting for opposition representatives in Riyadh. The United Nations will take forward discussions on steps towards a ceasefire, including at the next meeting of the International Syria Support Group, which we expect to take place before Christmas.

The aim is clear, as I have said—a transitional Government in six months, a new constitution, and free and fair elections within 18 months. I would argue that the key elements of a deal are emerging: ceasefires, opposition groups coming together, the regime looking at negotiation, and the key players—America and Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran—and key regional players such as Turkey all in the room together. My argument is this: hitting Daesh does not hurt this process; it helps this process, which is the eventual goal.

**Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con):** Does the Prime Minister agree that the murders on the beach in Tunisia and the carnage in Paris on 13 November have changed everything, and that the British people would find it rather odd if it took more than that for Britain to stand shoulder to shoulder with a number of other countries and take on Daesh?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend speaks for many. They attack us because of who we are, not because of what we do, and they want to attack us again and again. The question for us is, do we answer the call of our allies, some of our closest friends in the world—the French and the Americans—who want us to join them and Arab partners in this work, or do we ignore that call? If we ignore that call, think for a moment what that says about Britain as an ally. Think for a moment what it says to the countries in the region who will be

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asking themselves, “If Britain won’t come to the aid of France, its neighbour, in these circumstances, just how reliable a neighbour, a friend and an ally is this country?”

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make some progress on the vital subjects of humanitarian relief and the longer-term stabilisation, because I am conscious of the time. I set out for the House last week our support for refugees in the region, the extra £1 billion that we would be prepared to commit to Syria’s reconstruction, and the broad international alliance that we would work with in the rebuilding phase. However, let us be clear—my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) made this point—that people will not return to Syria if part of it is under the control of an organisation that enslaves Yazidis, throws gay people off buildings, beheads aid workers and forces children to marry before they are even 10 years old. We cannot separate the humanitarian work and the reconstruction work from dealing with Daesh itself.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP):** I welcome any comments that distance British Muslims and Muslims in Scotland from Daesh. I also welcome the Prime Minister’s use of that terminology. I ask him this question as a new Member of the House who is looking to seasoned parliamentarians and those who have been in this Chamber for some time, as new Members do on such occasions. Given that the language that is being used could be considered unbecoming of a parliamentarian, for the benefit of new Members, will the Prime Minister withdraw his remarks in relation to terrorist sympathisers?

**The Prime Minister:** I think everyone is now focused on the main issues in front of us. That is what we should be focused on.

Let me turn to the plan for post-conflict reconstruction to support a new Syrian Government when they emerge. I have said that we would be prepared to commit at least £1 billion to Syria’s reconstruction. The initial priorities would be protection, security, stabilisation and confidence-building measures, including meeting basic humanitarian needs such as education, health and shelter, and, of course, helping refugees to return. Over time, the focus would shift to the longer-term rebuilding of Syria’s shattered infrastructure, harnessing the expertise of the international financial institutions and the private sector. As I said last week, we are not in the business of trying to dismantle the Syrian state or its institutions. We would aim to allocate reconstruction funds against a plan agreed between a new, inclusive Syrian Government and the international community, once the conflict had ended. That is the absolute key.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**The Prime Minister:** I will take interventions from my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) and then another Opposition Member before drawing my remarks to a close.

**Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con):** What really matters to my constituents is whether they will be safer after this process. The Prime Minister is making a strong case for attacking the heart of this terrorist organisation. Will

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he assure the House that, as well as taking action in Syria, he will shore up security services and policing in the United Kingdom?

**The Prime Minister:** That is what our constituents want to know. What are we doing to strengthen our borders? What are we doing to exchange intelligence information across Europe? What are we doing to strengthen our intelligence and policing agencies, which the Chancellor spoke about so much last week? We should see all of this through the prism of national security. That is our first duty. When our allies are asking us to act, the intelligence is there and we have the knowledge that we can make a difference, I believe that we should act.

Let me take an intervention from the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

**Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD):** The Prime Minister rightly says how important it is that we not only stand with our allies and friends in Europe, but are seen to stand with them. However, he has not so far stood with those European allies on the matter of taking our fair share of refugees from this crisis and other crises. Will he look again at the request from Save the Children that this country take 3,000 orphaned child refugees who are currently in Europe?

**The Prime Minister:** We have played a huge part in Europe as the biggest bilateral donor. No other European country has given as much as Britain. We are also going to take 20,000 refugees, with 1,000 arriving by Christmas. However, I am happy to look once again at the issue of orphans. I think that it is better to take orphans from the region, rather than those who come over, sometimes with their extended family. I am very happy to look at that issue again, both in Europe and out of Europe, to see whether Britain can do more to fulfil our moral responsibilities.

Let me conclude. This is not 2003. We must not use past mistakes as an excuse for indifference or inaction. Let us be clear: inaction does not amount to a strategy for our security or that of the Syrian people, but inaction is a choice. I believe that it is the wrong choice. We face a clear threat. We have listened to our allies. We have taken legal advice. We have a unanimous United Nations resolution. We have discussed our proposed actions extensively at meetings of the National Security Council and the Cabinet. I have responded personally to the detailed report of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We have a proper motion before the House and we are having a 10 and a half hour debate today.

In that spirit, I look forward to the rest of the debate and to listening to the contributions of Members from all parts of the House. I hope that at the end of it all, the House will come together in large numbers to vote for Britain to play its part in defeating these evil extremists and taking the action that is needed now to keep our country safe. In doing so, I pay tribute to the extraordinary bravery and service of our inspirational armed forces, who will once again put themselves in harm’s way to protect our values and our way of life. I commend this motion to the House.

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**12.29 pm**

**Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab):** The whole House recognises that decisions to send British forces to war are the most serious, solemn and morally challenging of any that we have to take as Members of Parliament. The motion brought before the House by the Government, authorising military action in Syria against ISIL, faces us with exactly that decision. It is a decision with potentially far-reaching consequences for us all here in Britain, as well as for the people of Syria and the wider middle east.

For all Members, taking a decision that will put British servicemen and women in harm’s way, and almost inevitably lead to the deaths of innocents, is a heavy responsibility. It must be treated with the utmost seriousness, with respect given to those who make a different judgment about the right course of action to take. That is why the Prime Minister’s attempt to brand those who plan to vote against the Government as “terrorist sympathisers”, both demeans the office of the Prime Minister and, I believe, undermines the seriousness of the deliberations we are having today. If he now wants to apologise for those remarks, I would be happy to give way to him.

Since the Prime Minister is unmoved, we will have to move on with the debate. I hope that he will be stronger later and recognise that, yes, he made an unfortunate remark last night, and that apologising for it would be very helpful and improve the atmosphere of this debate.

**John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab):** My right hon. Friend is appropriately pointing out that by not withdrawing his slur on me and others, the Prime Minister is not showing leadership. Does he also agree that there is no place whatsoever in the Labour party for anybody who has been abusing those Labour Members who choose to vote with the Government on this resolution?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Abuse has no part in responsible democratic political dialogue, and I believe that very strongly. That is the way I wish to conduct myself, and I wish others to conduct themselves in that way.

**Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the Prime Minister came to the Dispatch Box and made a clear apology with a simple “I’m sorry”, he would clear the air immediately and we could move on with this debate?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** As he often does on these occasions, the Prime Minister appears to be taking advice from the Chancellor of the Exchequer on this matter. If he wants to apologise now that is fine. If he does not, well, the whole world can note that he is not apologising.

Since the Prime Minister first made his case for extending British bombing to Syria in the House last week, the doubts and unanswered questions expressed on both sides of the House have only grown and multiplied. That is why it is a matter of such concern that the Government have decided to push this vote through Parliament today. It would have been far better to allow a full two-day debate that would have given all Members the chance to make a proper contribution—you informed us, Mr Speaker, that 157 Members have applied to speak in this debate.

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**Nadhim Zahawi:** The right hon. Gentleman and I have worked together on the Kurdish issue, and he knows how tough the Kurds are finding it fighting ISIL in both Iraq and Syria. The shadow Foreign Secretary believes that the four conditions debated at the Labour party conference for taking action in Syria have been met. Why does the Leader of the Opposition disagree with him?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The hon. Gentleman may have to wait a few moments to hear the answer to that, but I promise that it will be in my speech. I am pleased that he made that intervention about the Kurdish people, because at some point over the whole middle east and the whole of this settlement, there must be a recognition of the rights of Kurdish people, whichever country they live in. The hon. Gentleman and I have shared that view for more than 30 years, and my view on that has not changed.

**John Woodcock:** I am glad that my right hon. Friend has mentioned the Kurds. Could he be clear at the Dispatch Box that neither he, nor anyone on these Benches, will in any way want to remove the air protection that was voted on with an overwhelming majority in the House 14 months ago?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. That is not part of the motion today, so we move on with this debate.

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Prime Minister understands that public opinion is moving increasingly against what I believe to be an ill-thought-out rush to war. He wants to hold this vote before opinion against it grows even further. Whether it is a lack of strategy worth the name, the absence of credible ground troops, the missing diplomatic plan for a Syrian settlement, the failure to address the impact of the terrorist threat or the refugee crisis and civilian casualties, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Prime Minister’s proposals for military action simply do not stack up.

**Ian Blackford:** I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the case has not been made. Under the circumstances and the slur on Opposition Members, will he reconsider the importance of the Labour party, in its entirety, joining those on the Scottish National party Benches in opposing the Government, and whip the Labour MPs to make sure the Government are defeated on the motion?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Every MP has to make a decision today, every MP has a vote today, every MP has a constituency, and every MP should be aware of what constituents’ and public opinion is. They will make up their own mind. Obviously, I am proposing that we do not support the Government’s motion tonight and I encourage all colleagues on all sides to join me in the Lobby tonight to oppose the Government’s proposals.

Last week, the Prime Minister focused his case for bombing in Syria on the critical test set by the very respected cross-party Foreign Affairs Committee. Given the holes in the Government’s case, it is scarcely surprising that last night the Committee reported that the Prime Minister had not “adequately addressed concerns”. In other words, the Committee judged that the Prime Minister’s case for bombing has failed its tests.

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**Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):** The Committee resolved four to three that the Prime Minister

“has not adequately addressed concerns”

contained in the Committee’s second report. The right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), who would have resisted, were absent. It is on a narrow point where, logically, it is almost impossible for the Prime Minister to adequately meet those concerns, given the fact he is not in a position to produce sufficient detail to satisfy some of my colleagues. It is a very weak point for the Leader of the Opposition to rely on. He needs to go to the substance.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He and I have often had very amicable discussions on many of these issues and I am sure we will again. The fact is, however, that at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee the verdict was that the Prime Minister had not adequately addressed concerns. Obviously, I understand there are differences of opinion. Goodness, there are plenty of differences of opinion all around this House, on both the Government and Opposition Benches. I therefore ask the Chair of the Select Committee to recognise that a decision has been made by his Committee.

After the despicable and horrific attacks in Paris last month, the question of whether the Government’s proposals for military action in Syria strengthen or undermine our own national security must be at the centre of our deliberations.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I have given way quite a lot of times already. There are 157 Members who wish to take part in the debate. I should try to move on and speed it up slightly, something which appears to meet with your approval, Mr Speaker.

There is no doubt that the so-call Islamic State has imposed a reign of sectarian and inhuman terror in Iraq, Syria and Libya. There is no question but that it also poses a threat to our own people. The issue now is whether extending British bombing from Iraq to Syria is likely to reduce or increase that threat to Britain, and whether it will counter or spread the terror campaign ISIL is waging across the middle east. The answers do not make the case for the Government motion. On the contrary, they are a warning to step back and vote against yet another ill-fated twist in this never-ending war on terror.

Let us start with a military dimension. The Prime Minister has been unable to explain why extending airstrikes to Syria will make a significant military impact on the existing campaign. ISIL is already being bombed in Syria or Iraq by the United States, France, Britain, Russia and other powers. Interestingly, Canada has withdrawn from this campaign and no longer takes part in it. During more than a year of bombing, ISIL has expanded as well as lost territory. ISIL gains included the Iraqi city of Ramadi and the Syrian city of Palmyra. The claim that superior British missiles will make the difference is hard to credit when the US and other states are, as mentioned in an earlier intervention, struggling to find suitable targets. In other words, extending British bombing is unlikely to make a huge difference.

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Secondly, the Prime Minister has failed to convince almost anyone that, even if British participation in the air campaign were to tip the balance, there are credible ground forces able to take back territory now held by ISIL. In fact, it is quite clear that there are no such forces.

Last week, the Prime Minister suggested that a combination of Kurdish militias and the Free Syrian Army would be able to fill the gap. He even claimed that a 70,000-strong force of moderate FSA fighters was ready to co-ordinate action against ISIL with the western air campaign. That claim has not remotely stood up to scrutiny. Kurdish forces are a distance away, so will be of little assistance in the Sunni Arab areas that ISIL controls. Neither will the FSA, which includes a wide range of groups that few, if any, would regard as moderate and which mostly operates in other parts of the country. The only ground forces able to take advantage of a successful anti-ISIL air campaign are stronger jihadist and Salafist groups close to the ISIL-controlled areas. I think that these are serious issues that need to be thought through very carefully, as I believe the Prime Minister’s bombing campaign could well lead to that.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I will give way again later in my contribution, but I should be allowed to make what I think is an important contribution to the debate.

That is why the logic of an extended air campaign is, in fact, towards mission creep and western boots on the ground. Whatever the Prime Minister may say now about keeping British combat troops out of the way, that is a real possibility.

Thirdly, the military aim of attacking ISIL targets in Syria is not really part of a coherent diplomatic strategy. UN Security Council resolution 2249, passed after the Paris atrocities and cited in today’s Government motion, does not give clear and unambiguous authorisation for UK bombing in Syria. To do so, it would have had to be passed under chapter 7 of the UN charter, to which the Security Council could not agree. The UN resolution is certainly a welcome framework for joint action to cut off funding, oil revenues and arms supplies from ISIL, but I wonder whether there are many signs of that happening.

**Charlotte Leslie (Bristol North West) (Con):** The right hon. Gentleman and I do not agree on very much, but I very much agree with him on the necessity to cut off oil supplies. I am therefore at a complete loss when it comes to understanding why he would oppose airstrikes, which play such a crucial part in targeting the oil supplies that provide funding for ISIL/Daesh.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The problem is that the oil supplies sold by ISIL go into Turkey and other countries, and I think we need to know exactly who is buying that oil, who is funding it, what banks are involved in the financial transactions that ultimately benefit ISIL, and which other countries in the region either are or are not involved. That is despite the clear risk of potentially disastrous incidents. The shooting down of a Russian military aircraft by Turkish forces is a sign of the danger of a serious escalation of this whole issue.

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**Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green):** The number of ground troops is, as my right hon. Friend says, unknown, and their composition is also unknown, but what we do know is that they are, by definition, opposition fighters: they are anti-Assad. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister still has a question to answer about how we can work with them to retake ground from Daesh without becoming drawn into a wider conflict with Russia, given that they are on the other side?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** That is an important point. The hon. Lady has been very active in trying to promote peace and humanitarian resolutions to the many conflicts that exist around the world.

Fourthly, the Prime Minister has avoided spelling out to the British people the warnings that he has surely been given about the likely impact of UK air strikes in Syria on the threat of terrorist attacks in the UK. That is something that everyone who backs the Government’s motion should weigh and think about very carefully before we vote on whether or not to send RAF pilots into action over Syria.

It is critically important that we, as a House, are honest with the British people about the potential consequences of the action that the Prime Minister is proposing today. I am aware that there are those with military experience—Conservative as well as Labour Members—who have argued that extending UK bombing will

“increase the short-term risks of terrorist attacks in Britain.”

We should also remember the impact on communities here in Britain. Sadly, since the Paris attacks there has been a sharp increase in Islamophobic incidents and physical attacks. I have discussed them with people in my local mosque, in my constituency, and they are horrific. Surely this message must go out from all of us in the House today: none of us—we can say this together—will tolerate any form of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or racism in any form in this country.

In my view, the Prime Minister has offered no serious assessment of the impact of an intensified air campaign on civilian casualties in ISIL-held Syrian territory, or on the wider Syrian refugee crisis. At least 250,000 have already been killed in Syria’s terrible civil war, 11 million have been made homeless, and 4 million have been forced to leave the country. Many more have been killed by the Assad regime than by ISIL itself. Yet more bombing in Syria will kill innocent civilians—there is no doubt about that—and will turn many more Syrians into refugees.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I will give way in a moment.

Yesterday I was sent this message from a constituent of mine who comes from Syria. *(Laughter.)*I am sorry, but it is not funny. This is about a family who are suffering.

My constituent’s name is Abdulaziz Almashi.

“I’m a Syrian from Manbij city, which is now controlled by ISIL”,

he wrote.

“Members of my family still live there and Isil didn’t kill them. My question to David Cameron is: ‘Can you guarantee the safety of my family when your air forces bomb my city?’”

*[Interruption.]*It is a fair question, from a family who are very concerned.

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**Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con):** I speak as someone who was a member of the military but has left. It seems to us that the Leader of the Opposition is making a fundamental point, namely that this is about national security. It is extremely difficult to deal with all the conflicting arguments and complex situations, but this comes down to national security, and the need to inhibit what these people are trying to do on the streets of this country.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Yes, of course security on the streets of this country, in all our communities, is very important. That is why we have supported the Government’s action in no longer pursuing the strategy of cutting the police, and also increasing security in this country. Clearly, none of us wants an atrocity on the streets of this country. My borough was deeply affected by 7/7 in 2005—

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member who has the Floor cannot be expected to give way to a further intervention when he is in the process of answering an existing one. The hon. Gentlemen are experienced enough denizens of this House to be aware of that.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy).

**Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab):** I am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for giving way. Does he accept that the 70,000 moderate Sunnis who the Prime Minister claims are in Syria comprise many different jihadist groups? There is concern across the House that in degrading ISIL/Daesh, which is possible, we might create a vacuum into which other jihadists would come, over time. Surely that would not make the streets of Britain safer.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** For the sake of north London geography, I shall now give way to the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes).

**Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con):** The right hon. Gentleman has maintained a consistent position in this House on airstrikes. On 26 September 2014, when he voted against airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq, he said:

“I do not believe that further air strikes and the deepening of our involvement will solve the problem.”—[*Official Report*, 26 September 2014; Vol. 585, c. 1332.]

Does he maintain his opposition to airstrikes in Iraq, as well as to extending them to Syria?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank both Members for their interventions. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) makes a serious point. We have to be careful about what will happen in the future. As the Prime Minister and others have said, we must be aware of the danger that some people, mainly young people, will become deeply radicalised and end up doing very dangerous things. Is the radicalisation of a small but significant number of young people across Europe a product of the war or of something else? We need to think very deeply about that, about what has happened

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in this world since 2001, and about the increasing number of people who are suffering because of that. I rest my case at that point.

There is no EU-wide strategy to provide humanitarian assistance to the victims. Perhaps most importantly of all, is the Prime Minister able to explain how British bombing in Syria will contribute to a comprehensive negotiated political settlement of the Syrian war? Such a settlement is widely accepted to be the only way to ensure the isolation and defeat of ISIL. ISIL grew out of the invasion of Iraq, and it has flourished in Syria in the chaos and horror of a multi-fronted civil war.

**Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab):** The Prime Minister spoke often of the choice between action and inaction, but those of us who will be voting against the airstrikes also want to see action. The Prime Minister said almost nothing about cutting off the financial supplies to Daesh that buy the bombs and help to radicalise recruits. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need action on that matter?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** We absolutely need action to ensure that there is a diplomatic and political solution to the crisis. I welcome what the Prime Minister said about speeding up the process in Vienna, but surely the message ought to be, “Let’s speed that up,” rather than sending the bombers in now, if we are to bring about a political settlement.

We need the involvement of all the main regional and international powers. I know that that has been attempted. I know that there have been discussions in Vienna, and we welcome that, but it is regrettable that Geneva II—

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Mr Speaker, I will try to make some progress with my speech, if I may. Over 150 Members wish to speak, and long speeches from the Front Benches will take time away from the Back-Benchers’ speeches. The aim must be to establish a broad-based Government in Syria who have the support of the majority of their people, difficult as that is to envisage at the present time. Such a settlement—

**Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con):** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** No. Such a settlement could help to take back territory from ISIL and bring about its lasting defeat in Syria, but—

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Mr Speaker, I am really sorry to have to tell Conservative Members that I have given way quite a lot to Members on both sides of the House, and I am now going to continue with my speech. Ultimately—

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It is a long-established convention of this House that the Member who has the Floor gives way, or not, as he or she chooses. The Leader of the Opposition has made it clear that, for now, he is not giving way. The appropriate response is not, then, for a Member to jump and shout, “Give way!” That is just not terribly sensible.

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**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The point I was making was that ultimately, the solution has to be brought about by all the people of Syria themselves. On that, surely, we are all agreed. The Government—

**Sir Simon Burns:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thought I had made it clear, and that the Speaker had made it clear, that at the moment I am not giving way; I am really sorry, but I am not. Okay? The Government’s proposals for—

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Though it is indeed customary that he who holds the Floor decides whether to give way, is it not also customary to answer questions when they are put in interventions? We are waiting for the right hon. Gentleman’s answer on Iraq.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) is a sufficiently experienced parliamentarian to know that he has made his own point in his own way, and it is on the record.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Government’s—[Hon. Members: “Answer!”] Mr Speaker, if I could move on with my speech, I would be most grateful. The Government’s proposal for military action in Syria is not backed by clear and unambiguous authorisation by the United Nations. It does not meet the seven tests set down by the Foreign Affairs Committee, and it does not fulfil three of the four conditions laid down in my own party conference resolution of a couple of months ago.

In the past week, voice has been given to the growing opposition to the Government’s bombing plans—across the country, in Parliament, outside in the media, and indeed in my own party. I believe that this is in consideration of all the wars that we have been involved in over the last 14 years. These matters were debated a great deal during my campaign to be elected leader of the Labour party, and many people think very deeply about these matters. In the light of that record of western military interventions, these matters have to be analysed. British bombing in Syria risks yet more of what President Obama, in a very thoughtful moment, called the “unintended consequences” of the war in Iraq, which he himself opposed at the time. The spectre of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya looms over this debate.

**Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con):** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** No, I will not give way; I will carry on with my speech. To oppose another war and intervention is not pacifism; it is hard-headed common sense. That is what we should be thinking about today in the House. To resist ISIL’s determination to draw the western powers back into the heart of the middle east is not to turn our backs on allies; it is to refuse to play into the hands of ISIL as I suspect some of its members want us to. Is it wrong for us here in Westminster to see a problem, pass a motion, and drop bombs, pretending we are doing something to solve it? That is what we did in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Has terrorism increased or decreased as a result of all that? The Prime Minister said he was looking to build a consensus around the military action

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he wants to take. I do not believe he has achieved anything of the kind. He has failed, in my view, to make the case for another bombing campaign.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Jeremy Corbyn:** All of our efforts should instead go into bringing the Syrian civil war to an end. Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya: I ask Members to think very carefully about the previous decisions we have made. *[Interruption.]*What we are proposing to do today is send British bombers—

**Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On a number of occasions complaints have been received from the public, particularly about Prime Minister’s questions. What do you think the public make of it when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition is shouted down constantly by those on the Government Benches?

**Mr Speaker:** I think what the public want is a civilised, although robust, debate by Members on both sides of the House. I thank the hon. Gentleman, a very experienced Member, for that point of order. Let us proceed without fear or favour. I call Mr Jeremy Corbyn.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Sometimes in this House we get carried away with the theatricals of the place, and forget there are millions of people who have sent us to this House to represent them. We should be able to conduct our debates in a decent, respectful and civilised manner. Short as this debate is, given the number of Members who want to speak, I hope all those Members who have applied to speak get called.

I conclude with this point: in my view, only a negotiated political and diplomatic endeavour to bring about an end to the civil war in Syria will bring some hope to the millions who have lost their homes, who are refugees, and who are camped out in various points all across Europe, dreaming of a day when they can go home. I think our overriding goal should be to end that civil war in Syria, and obviously also to protect the people of this country. I do not believe that the motion put forward by the Prime Minister achieves that, because it seems to put the emphasis on bombing now, whereas I think it should be not on bombing now, but on bringing all our endeavours, all our intelligence and all our efforts—*[Interruption.]*It is very strange that Members do not seem to understand that there are millions who watch these debates who want to hear what is being said, and do not want to hear people shouting at each other.

For those reasons, I urge Members on all sides of the House to think very carefully about the responsibility that lies with them today. Do we send in bombers, not totally aware of what all the consequences will be, or do we pause, not send them in, and instead put all our efforts into bringing about a peaceful humanitarian and just political settlement to the terrible situation faced by the people in Syria?

**1.3 pm**

**Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con):** As all of us are trying to show responsibility and duty, I do not think there is anybody on either side of the House who in any way relishes the decision we are being asked to take today. It is not straightforward, like the response to the invasions of Kuwait and the Falklands. It is a

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very difficult decision we are being asked to take, and in taking it we must have two issues in the forefront of our thinking: first, the security of our own country and, secondly, the desperate need to restore stability in the middle east.

But rather than rehearse all the arguments, I would just like to emphasise a few points which I would ask the House solemnly to consider. The question of whether to commit our armed forces has over the last few years become seriously muddied both by the painful experience of past decisions and by the complexity of the unfolding disorder across the Arab world. The experience of Afghanistan in part—to which the Leader of the Opposition referred—and of Iraq more significantly, has led to growing reticence, and indeed distrust, in this House and outside it about any proposal for military action. So the first point I would like to emphasise is that we must take the decision today based on the merits of today; we must base it on today’s facts and not on yesterday’s mistakes and regrets.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Alan Duncan:** Before giving way quickly, may I politely point out to the Stop the War Coalition that when it comes to Syria, stopping the war is exactly what we want to do.

**Mrs Moon:** I absolutely agree that what we need are facts and greater clarity about our capability to take on the task that is ahead of us. Yesterday we were told there were between 20,000 and 30,000 Daesh across Syria and Iraq, but I could not be given a number as to how many Taliban we were fighting in Afghanistan, to get a comparator, when we had 10,000 of our troops and 30,000 Americans fighting them. I could not get that, and I could not get an answer as to how often we had used our Brimstone missiles and how many more planes we would be flying. Don’t we need those questions answered?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but interventions must be brief; they must not be mini-speeches, however well intentioned.

**Sir Alan Duncan:** May I implore the hon. Lady to appreciate that the search for certainty in the middle east is a vain hope? The watchword I learned 30 years ago when I first went there was, “If you’re not confused, you don’t understand.” It is a very complex world in which we are deciding to act.

Let me move on to my second point. Again, I address this to the Leader of the Opposition: we must not underestimate the extent and nature of the danger we face, and say that because it is all over there, it is not over here. The phenomenon of ISIS/Daesh is not only a vicious force running rampant through that miserable space between Iraq and Syria; it is also fuelling those who would readily walk up the main street of a major city with a suicide bomb or carrying a Kalashnikov. So I urge those who say that air strikes would increase that danger not to give into that narrative: these people are already targeting us now.

**Nadhim Zahawi:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

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**Sir Alan Duncan:** No.

Thirdly, we have to see this threat—

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Alan Duncan:** No.

Thirdly, we have to see this threat in the context of even greater regional dangers. We are witnessing the collapse of nation states across potentially the whole of Arabia, along with the violent release of centuries of sectarian hatred. A crucial element of our policy should be to try to stop this spreading. That means that we must support stable rule within the six countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council. Those who just attack the conduct of our Gulf allies simply do not understand the horror that would be unleashed by further instability in the region. Even now, we face the real prospect of an arc of brutality and terrorism stretching from Syria, through Iraq to Yemen, and right across in a terrifying link with the horn of Africa.

Fourthly, we cannot turn away from this threat and subcontract our obligations. If we are to pursue the destruction of ISIS/Daesh, rebuild stable government, underpin wider stability and make all of that—

**Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP):** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Alan Duncan:** No. And make all of that a serious and convincing objective of our foreign policy, we must be part of the convoy that is trying to do it. We cannot negligently—as I would see it—watch it roll by while not playing our part. Put frankly, our international reputation has suffered from the parliamentary vote in August 2013. Our allies now question—

**Mr MacNeil:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Alan Duncan:** No. Our allies now question whether we can be relied upon when they call for joint assistance. If we choose today to remain on the sidelines, especially when a new and unequivocal UN resolution is in place, it will signal to the world that the UK has, indeed, chosen to withdraw. We should not be in the business of national resignation from the world stage. Perhaps the paradox of our position today is not that we are doing too much, but that we are doing too little.

If I do have a concern—again, I look directly at the Leader of the Opposition—it is that the action I hope we will vote for tonight is not the whole answer, and the Prime Minister is not pretending that it is. The hope that local, so-called moderate forces can do the job on the ground and somehow put Humpty Dumpty together again is, of course, more of an act of faith than a certain plan, but it is wrong for the Leader of the Opposition to dismiss their significance and conclude that their composition is sufficient reason to do nothing.

I think we should carry this motion tonight. We have to carry it with our eyes open, knowing that we are flying into a mess that shows no easy prospect of being quickly resolved, but we cannot leave a vile force unchallenged. These air strikes do matter. I believe they are justified, but I also think that the future judgment of

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the Prime Minister about what then follows will eventually become more important than the decision we will take tonight.

**1.11 pm**

**Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), a fellow member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, although I fear that we will be in different Lobbies later this evening.

May I begin by intimating support for amendment (b), which appears in my name and those of other right hon. and hon. Members? It is signed by more than 100 Members from six different political parties from right across the House and proposes that the House

“while welcoming the renewed impetus towards peace and reconstruction in Syria, and the Government’s recognition that a comprehensive strategy against Daesh is required, does not believe that the case for the UK’s participation in the ongoing air campaign in Syria by 10 countries has been made under current circumstances, and consequently declines to authorise military action in Syria.”

I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of his statement and for the briefings by his national security adviser, Sir Mark Lyall Grant, and colleagues from the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and other agencies. I again put on the record our appreciation to all of those who are charged with keeping us safe at home and abroad. Notwithstanding the profound differences I have with the Prime Minister on the issue, I commend him for briefing parties and parliamentarians in recent weeks, and for the tone he adopted in last week’s statement.

It is disappointing, to say the least, that the Prime Minister chose to describe parliamentary opponents of his bombing plans as “terrorist sympathisers”. The amendment against bombing is signed by the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), who served with the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers in Northern Ireland. It is also signed by the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) of the Labour party, who served in the Territorial Army in Afghanistan, and by my hon. Friends the Members for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) and for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), both of whose husbands served with distinction in the armed forces. It has also been signed by Members from Northern Ireland, who have had to experience terrorism at first hand. It is totally wrong to impugn Members of this House who differ with the Government on bombing Syria as “terrorist sympathisers”.

The Prime Minister has had numerous occasions to apologise, but I fear he is not going to do so. *[Interruption.]* I would be prepared to give way to the Prime Minister if he wishes to apologise, but he does not and I will not give way to other hon. Members. I hope that the Prime Minister regrets what he said.

We in the Scottish National party share the concerns of everybody else in this House and the country about the terrorist threat from Daesh. We deplore the Assad regime and have regularly raised the issue of refugees in the region and in Europe. There is agreement across this House that the threat from Daesh is real and that doing nothing is not an option. However, we recall that only

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two years ago, this Prime Minister and this Government wanted us to bomb the opponents of Daesh, which would no doubt have strengthened it.

We have not heard this yet, but there is no shortage of countries currently bombing in Syria. Most recently, the Russians have been attacking Daesh—and, too often, the moderate opposition to Assad as well. Coalition nations that have conducted strikes in Syria include—it is a long list—Australia, Bahrain, Canada, France, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, which, incidentally, also uses the Brimstone weapon system, the Republic of Turkey, which, interestingly, is also bombing our allies in Kurdistan, the United Arab Emirates and the United States of America. Open sources confirm that since September 2014, those air strikes have involved F-16 Falcons, F-22s, F/A-18 Super Hornets, sea-launched Tomahawk cruise missiles and weapons from drones launched from above Syria. The United States central command, Centcom, confirms that the United States has conducted more than 2,700 air strikes in Syria.

Daily strike updates from the Combined Joint Task Force coalition show that military forces have continued to attack Daesh terrorists in Syria, using bombers and remotely piloted aircraft. Reports from the United States military show that, in recent days, near Ayn Issa, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle; near Raqqa, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed ISIL vehicles; near Deir ez-Zor, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle; and, near al-Hawl, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint. The point is that bombing is currently under way in Syria and to pretend that it is not already taking place is highly misleading.

**Mr Burrowes:** Does the right hon. Gentleman think there is a legitimate case for our allies’ operations in Syria, or does he want them to withdraw?

**Angus Robertson:** I am hugely supportive of efforts that can lead to stabilisation in Iraq. That is very important, but I want to stress one thing in particular: we have a particular responsibility towards the Kurds, both in Iraq and in Syria. I wish that the Prime Minister, when dealing with NATO allies, would use his good offices to say that we should not undermine their efforts in Iraq and in Syria.

**Mr Burrowes:** Answer the question.

**Angus Robertson:** I have answered the hon. Gentleman’s question. We should ensure that Turkey does not bomb our Kurdish allies, and we should do everything we can to address that.

**Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con)** *rose—*

**Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con)** *rose—*

**Angus Robertson:** I have already given way and I want to make some progress.

The Prime Minister has asked us to listen to his case for bombing in Syria, and we have done so. I have repeatedly asked two very specific questions, as have other Members on both sides of the House. How will the UK plan secure peace on the ground in Syria? As the Foreign Affairs Committee has asked,

“which ground forces will take, hold, and administer territories captured from Daesh in Syria?”

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My second question is: how will the UK plan secure long-term stability and reconstruction in Syria, given that the UK spent 13 times more on bombing Libya than on its post-conflict stability and reconstruction? How much does the Prime Minister estimate that will cost, and how much has he allocated from the United Kingdom?

I want to address those two questions. On the issue of ground forces, we have been told that there are 70,000 troops who are opposed to Assad and to Daesh and who could take the territory that Daesh currently holds. The problem is that only a part of those forces is moderate and there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that they would definitely deploy from other parts of the country to counter Daesh. Members will have heard me ask the Prime Minister in an intervention how many of those 70,000 are moderate and how many are fundamentalists. I have not had an answer to that question, and I would invite any Government Member to tell the rest of the House what it is—[Hon. Members: “Silence.”] Silence, on a critical issue—

**Mr Grieve** *rose—*

**Angus Robertson:** I will give way in a moment to the esteemed Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, of course.

This is a vital point, which was raised by the Foreign Affairs Committee: a key part to any credibility for the argument that a bombing strategy will lead to medium and long-term peace in Syria and deal with Daesh is that there are ground forces capable of taking the ground when they manage to displace and degrade Daesh forces. We have asked repeatedly, and I will ask again. I will give way if any Member from the Government side wants to elucidate and explain to the House what the Prime Minister would not—*[Interruption.]* The Foreign Secretary is chuntering, and I would be happy to give way to him if he will confirm from the Dispatch Box the make-up of the 70,000 forces. [Hon. Members: “Go on.”] I have now asked a question directly to the Prime Minister that he did not answer and I have challenged the Foreign Secretary to answer the question. Is there anybody from the Government side who will answer the question?

**Richard Benyon:** I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. We asked about a similar point in the Defence Committee yesterday. The right hon. Gentleman is making a nit-picking, quibbling point—[Hon. Members: “Oh!] Will Members hear me out? The right hon. Gentleman is dancing on the head of a pin to try to achieve the result he started with. There are these people, we have to trust them, they are not on Assad’s side and they are not on ISIL’s side. We need to work with them.

**Angus Robertson:** Let us get this right. The Prime Minister has been asked the question; the Foreign Secretary was given an opportunity to confirm the answer to the House; Members from the Government side were asked to answer the question and they have not—

**Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)** *rose—*

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**Angus Robertson:** I see another Member prepared to intervene, so let me accept that intervention if we are to get an answer to the question about the 70,000 non-Assad and non-Daesh forces in Syria. How many are moderate and how many are fundamentalist?

**Mark Pritchard:** The right hon. Gentleman is a clever man and rarely asks a question to which he does not know the answer. I put the question back to him: how many moderates does he think there are? He also seems to be tied up on the 70,000 and seems to have forgotten the Kurds in Syria, the several battalions of Syriac Christians and the Arabs in north and north-east Syria who will work with the Free Syrian Army to take on Daesh.

**Angus Robertson:** Anybody watching this debate and reading *Hansard* in future will be able to recognise that this question has been asked time and time again and that we have not had an answer—

**Tom Brake:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Angus Robertson:** I will not, as I have now given way a significant number of times and nobody has answered the question—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry. If my esteemed colleague the Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee can answer the question, I would be delighted to give way.

**Mr Grieve:** What interests me about the right hon. Gentleman’s argument is that he raises perfectly legitimate questions which should, I hope, be answered in the course of the debate. However, he glosses over his and his party’s position on the current operations which, I think he would agree, are controlling Daesh’s ability to perpetrate violence and cruelty in the area and terrorism in Europe. If those actions involving our allies in Syria and Iraq are achieving that goal, I find it difficult to understand how he can argue that we ourselves should not co-operate in northern Syria.

**Angus Robertson:** I have the greatest of respect for the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and he makes good points. Later in my comments I will come on to some of the questions he raises. I note respectfully, again, that we have not heard an answer to the question that I have posed. Those on the Government Front Bench have the opportunity, again, if they wish, to tell the House—I note that they do not.

**Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab):** As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I was in the middle east last week. We went to Cairo, Amman and Beirut—cities that have also suffered destruction. We spoke to military people, counter-terrorism people and politicians, and I can give the right hon. Gentleman the answer that he seeks. There are about 10,000 to 15,000, and that was the answer given by everyone there.

**Angus Robertson:** My goodness, Mr Speaker. That is a very important intervention from the hon. Lady. From her experience, having travelled the region, she is suggesting that the Government’s figures, with which we have been provided, are massively wrong. This is a very important point. We are now hearing, on a crucial issue raised by the Foreign Affairs Committee, that far from the 70,000 we have heard about repeatedly, the number is significantly less. That should worry us all.

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**Nadhim Zahawi** *rose—*

**Angus Robertson:** I will make some progress.

The problem with this critical issue is that only part of the forces that the Prime Minister and his colleagues have spoken about are moderate and there is no evidence whatsoever that they would definitely deploy from other parts of the country to counter Daesh. It appears to be totally wishful thinking that without a comprehensive ceasefire first in Syria we can expect any redirection of any forces from other fronts in Syria.

On stabilising and rebuilding Syria, the second question I posed to the Prime Minister, we are advised by the World Bank that that will cost $170 billion. The Prime Minister has made a commitment to contribute £1 billion towards that mammoth task, which is welcome new money to deal with the rebuilding after the stabilisation of Syria, which we welcome. We are entitled to ask, however, whether a contribution of less than 1% of what is required will realistically be enough.

Yesterday, like some other Members of the House, I took the time to meet Syrian exiles to discuss their experiences and to hear their views. It was heart-breaking to hear about people who are literally surviving just on hope; of 16-year-olds who wish only to attend their makeshift schools in the basement while enduring barrel bombing from the Assad regime from above. They asked whether we are seriously asking people to stop fighting Assad and to move to another part of the country to fight Daesh. They asked how we expect people to fight Daesh if they have no feeling of any support.

Yesterday, we were written to as parliamentarians by Syrians in the UK from many different organisations: from Syria Solidarity UK, the British Syrian Community of Manchester, Kurds House, Syrian Community South West, Peace and Justice for Syria, Scotland for Syria, the Syrian Welsh Society, the Syrian Platform for Peace and the Syrian Association of Yorkshire. In their letter, they said that MPs are being asked the wrong question in Syria: whether or not to bomb Daesh. They said—

**Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)** *rose—*

**Rehman Chishti** *rose—*

**Angus Robertson:** If I can just make this point, I will give way to the hon. Gentlemen.

These many organisations from across the United Kingdom said that Daesh must be defeated for the sake of people in Syria as well as for the safety of people in Europe and of people in Britain, but they stressed that the greatest threat to Syrians comes from Assad, rather than Daesh; the number of civilians killed by Assad’s forces is more than two and a half times the number of UK civilians killed in the second world war.

**Andrew Gwynne:** The right hon. Gentleman is making an important point. Irrespective of how the House of Commons votes tonight, is it not important that we see a successful political resolution to the difficulties in Syria? The Prime Minister has set out timescales for when he expects there to be a transitional Government. Was the right hon. Gentleman as surprised as I was by those timescales given the impasse between the likes of Russia and Iran on the one hand and the USA, France and others on the other about the future of Assad?

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**Angus Robertson:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I am about to come to the political process in a second, but first I would like to give way to the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), whom I commend on behalf of everyone in the House who has supported the campaign to call Daesh by its real name and nothing else.

**Rehman Chishti:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman and his entire party for being among the first to support the campaign to change the terminology as part of our efforts to defeat this evil organisation. Will he join me in urging the Leader of the Opposition to join his shadow Foreign Secretary, the Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee, his shadow equalities Minister and his shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury in using the right terminology as part of our effort to defeat this terrorist organisation, especially now that the Government have agreed to use it?

**Angus Robertson:** I agree with everything the hon. Gentleman has said. As somebody who is incredibly proud to have reported for the BBC World Service for nearly a decade, it is beyond me why my former employers cannot find it in themselves to use the appropriate terminology. I call on them to do so from today onwards.

The Syrians I met made an appeal that civilian protection should be a primary concern in any military action by the UK, and to protect civilians, MPs need explicitly to back concrete action to end Assad’s air attacks on civilians. This was the point raised by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne). Like all parties and Members, the SNP supports the international initiative on Syria agreed in Vienna to secure a ceasefire in Syria, to transition to stable representative government and to counter terrorist groups, including Daesh. We believe that these aims will be secured only through agreement and a serious long-term commitment to Syria. The key diplomatic priority for the Government must surely be to make sure that the timescale is as quick as can be delivered. The UK must step up its support for the international Syria support initiative and other diplomatic efforts to secure a ceasefire in Syria, to ensure a political transition, to combat terrorists such as Daesh and to plan for long-term reconstruction and stability support.

The Government have not answered the questions posed by the FAC. In fact, neither did a majority of those who voted on the issue in the FAC. In these circumstances, we cannot support the Government. It is important, however, that a message goes out to our armed forces that, regardless of the differences in this place, we wish for their safety and we appreciate their professionalism. This is particularly relevant for me, as it would appear that most aircraft deployed to the region will be from RAF Lossiemouth in my constituency.

The UK Government will have a huge problem with legitimacy and a mandate for the operation in Scotland. They might well win the vote tonight, but they will do so with the support of only two out of 59 Scotland MPs. An opinion poll today shows that 72% of Scots are opposed to the Government’s bombing plans, and in normal circumstances, in a normal country, the armed forces would not be deployed. I was a co-sponsor of the 2003 amendment to oppose invading Iraq, and I am proud to co-sponsor today’s amendment opposing bombing in Syria. I appeal to colleagues on all sides to make sure

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we do not ignore the lessons of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Let us not repeat past mistakes. Let us not give the green light to military action, without a comprehensive and credible plan to win the peace.

**1.33 pm**

**Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con):** It is very important that the whole House is clear about what this debate is not about. It is not about provoking a new confrontation with Daesh, given that it has already confronted peace, decency and humanity. We have seen what it is capable of—beheadings, crucifixions, mass rape; we have seen the refugee crisis it has provoked in the middle east, with its terrible human cost; and we have seen its willingness to export jihad whenever it can. It is also not about bombing Syria per se, as is being portrayed outside; it is the extension of a military campaign we are already pursuing in Iraq, across what is, in effect, a non-existent border in the sand. I am afraid that the Leader of the Opposition’s unwillingness to answer the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) will give the clear impression that he is not just against the extension of the bombing campaign into Syrian territory, but against bombing Daesh at all, which is a very serious position to hold.

To understand the nature of the threat we face and why it requires a military response, we need to understand the mindset of the jihadists themselves. First, they take an extreme and distorted religious position; then they dehumanise their opponents by calling them infidels, heretics and apostates—let us remember that the majority of those they have killed were Muslims, not those of other religions; then they tell themselves it is God’s work and therefore they accept no man-made restraint—no laws, no borders; and then they deploy extreme violence in the prosecution of their self-appointed mission. We have seen that violence on the sands of Tunisia, and we heard it in the screams of the Jordanian pilot who was burned alive in a cage.

We must be under no illusions about the nature of the threat we face. Daesh is not like the armed political terrorists we have seen in the past; it poses a fundamentally different threat. It is a group that seeks not accommodation but domination. We need to understand that before determining our response.

**Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con):** My right hon. Friend will know of concerns that Daesh fighters are leaving Syria for Libya in greater numbers. Does he believe that when we are tackling Daesh in Syria, we will have to confront it in Libya at some stage as well?

**Dr Fox:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I said, we have not chosen this confrontation; Daesh has chosen to confront us—and the free world, and decency and humanity. It is a prerequisite for stability and peace in the future that we deal with the threat wherever it manifests itself.

There are two elements to the motion: the military and the political. On the military question of whether British bombing, as part of an allied action in Syria, will be a game changer, I say, no, it will not, but it will make a significant and serious contribution to the alliance. The Prime Minister is absolutely correct that some of our weaponry enables us to minimise the number of

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civilian casualties, and that has a double importance: it is important in itself from a humanitarian point of view, as well as in not handing a propaganda weapon to our opponents in the region. Britain can contribute: we did it successfully in Libya, by minimising the number of civilian casualties, which is not an unimportant contribution to make.

We must be rational and cautious about the wider implications. No war or conflict is ever won from the air alone, and the Prime Minister was right to point out that this is only a part of the wider response. If we degrade Daesh’s command and control, territory will need to be taken and held, so ultimately we will need an international coalition on the ground if this is to be successful in the long term. There may be as many Syrian fighters as the Joint Intelligence Committee has set out, and they may be co-ordinating with the international coalition, or be capable of doing so, but we must also recognise the need for a wider ability to take and hold territory. To those who oppose the motion, I say this: the longer we wait to act, the fewer our allies’ numbers and the less their capabilities are likely to be, as part of a wider coalition. If we do not have stability and security on the ground in Syria, there is no chance of peace, whatever happens in Vienna.

On the political side, our allies think it is absurd for Britain to be part of a military campaign against Daesh in Iraq but not in Syria. It is a patently militarily absurd position, and we have a chance to correct it today. But we must not contract out the security of the United Kingdom to our allies. It is a national embarrassment that we are asking our allies to do what we believe is necessary to tackle a fundamental threat to the security of the United Kingdom, and this House of Commons should not stand for it. Finally on that point, when we do not act, it makes it much more difficult for us diplomatically to persuade other countries to continue their airstrikes, and the peeling off of the United Arab Emirates, then Jordan and then Saudi Arabia from the coalition attacking Daesh is of great significance. We have a chance to reverse that if we take a solid position today.

This motion and the action it proposes will not in itself defeat Daesh, but it will help, and alongside the Vienna process it may help to bring peace in the long term to the Syrian people. Without the defeat of Daesh, there will be no peace. We have not chosen this conflict, but we cannot ignore it; to do nothing is a policy position which will have its own consequences. If we do act, that does not mean we will not see a terrorist atrocity in this country, but if we do not tackle Daesh at source over there, there will be an increasing risk that we have to face the consequences over here. That would be an abdication of the primary responsibility of this House of Commons, which is the protection and defence of the British people. That is what this debate is all about.

**1.41 pm**

**Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab):** There is of course absolutely no doubt that Daesh/IS is a vile, loathsome, murderous organisation, and the attack in Paris—the murder of 130 innocent people—could just as well have been in London. The choice of Paris was a retaliation against French activity in its region, but that does not justify our taking action unless it were

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appropriate, relevant and, above all, successful. These people claim to call themselves Islamic, and the Prime Minister talked about reclaiming Islam from them—they do not own Islam. Hundreds of millions of Muslims throughout the world are appalled by their murders, their beheadings, their kidnappings—all the abominable things they do. But our loathing of IS and our wish to get rid of it, to defeat it, to stop it is not the issue here today. The issue here is: what action could be taken to stop IS and get rid of it? I have to say that I do not see such an action.

The Prime Minister spoke about getting a transitional Government in Syria and about the situation in Syria. I have been to Syria many times. I did so with some distaste as shadow Foreign Secretary, as I met leading officials in the Syrian Administration—I knew they were murderers. They murder their own people. They murdered 10,000 people in Hama alone. I would be delighted to see them got rid of, but they are not going to go. There is talk about negotiations in Vienna, but the assumption that somehow or other they are going to result in getting rid of Assad and the Administration is a delusion. Putin, one of the most detestable leaders of any state in the world, will make sure that because they are his allies and they suit him, action against them is not going to be successful.

What is the issue today? It is not about changing the regime in Syria, which would make me very happy indeed. It is not about getting rid of Daesh, which would also make me very happy indeed. It is about what practical action can result in some way in damaging Daesh, stopping its atrocities, stopping the flood of people who are fleeing from it and stopping the people who are flocking to it, including, sadly, a small number of people from this country. If what the Government were proposing today would in any way not simply or totally get rid of Daesh but weaken it significantly so that it would not go on behaving in this abominable fashion, I would not have any difficulty in voting for this motion. But there is absolutely no evidence of any kind that bombing Daesh—bombing Raqqa—will result in an upsurge of other people in the region to get rid of Daesh. It might cause some damage, but it will not undermine them. What it will undoubtedly do, despite the Prime Minister’s assurance, which I am sure he gave in good faith, is kill innocent civilians. I am not going to be a party to killing innocent civilians for what will simply be a gesture.

I am not interested in gesture politics and I am not interested in gesture military activity; I am interested in effective military activity, and if that is brought before this House, I vote for it. When the previous Conservative Government came to us asking for our support to get rid of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, I, as shadow Foreign Secretary, formulated the policy that led Labour Members of Parliament into the Lobby to vote for that. I am not interested in gestures; I am interested in effective activity. This Government’s motion and the activity that will follow, including military action from the air, will not change the situation on the ground. I am not interested in making a show. I am not interested in Members of this House putting their hands up for something that in their own hearts they know will not work, and for that reason I shall vote against the Government motion this evening.

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**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Mr Speaker:** Order. An eight-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now apply, with immediate effect.

**1.47 pm**

**Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):** There are those who have honourably opposed intervention on every occasion since 2003, including my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), a fellow member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the mover of today’s principal amendment. Part of the strength of his case is that he was undoubtedly right over Iraq in 2003 and, prima facie, Libya in 2011—that is the subject of a Committee inquiry. However, it is my judgment that he was wrong last year to oppose our support for the Government of Iraq against ISIL. I do not know what he would say to the Yazidi families rescued by British forces and British helicopters from the terror that ISIL brought, and I am satisfied that our military effort in Iraq over the past year has been to the enormous credit of our armed forces and has stabilised Iraq in the face of a rapidly advancing threat from ISIL. It wholly justified the strong majority that this House then gave for that intervention.

**Mr Baron:** My hon. Friend directly referred to me, so I will answer him as best I can. The reason a number of us opposed the motion about airstrikes in Iraq last year was simply that we did not feel then—and I still have great reservations now—that we had a comprehensive plan. We have not beaten ISIL in Iraq, despite nearly 1 million security forces on the Government payroll. That brings us on to Syria, because we have nothing near that in Syria and we still do not have that plan.

**Crispin Blunt:** The position in Iraq was desperate. Baghdad was threatened by the advance of ISIL, and it was absolutely necessary that the international community went to the aid of the Government and the people of Iraq.

**Nadhim Zahawi:** My hon. Friend talks about the desperation in Iraq. I have just had an email from someone, who shall remain anonymous, who is working in Raqqa. They said, “Daesh are the death that is stretching from the east. When you see them, it is as if you are seeing the angel of death. They are in Raqqa right now. How can I carry on exposing my child to severed heads and hanging bodies on a daily basis? A mother in Raqqa.”

**Crispin Blunt:** I agree with my hon. Friend. Whether we like it or not, the reality is that ISIL is at war with us. We do not have to confect some case about weapons of mass destruction. This is not about a threat to the citizens of a country from their own Government, but about people at war with us, our values and our society. This is not a war of choice. I have not spoken to anyone who demurs from the proposition that ISIL must be denied the territory that it currently controls. Although the defeat of ISIL and its ideology will be the work of many years, even decades, the retaking of that territory is an urgent and immediate requirement. That therefore is the mission, which is virtually impossible to achieve, while the civil war rages in Syria. It is also a necessary first step.

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After the negotiations and the agreement of the International Syria Support Group at Vienna on 14 November, a way can be seen to that transition. Before then, the Government were not able to offer an answer to our question, which was this: Which ground forces will take hold and administer the territories captured from ISIL in Syria to the satisfaction of the Committee? In the wake of that meeting, they could and did provide an answer.

Indeed the Prime Minister made the point today, when he rather revealingly mentioned the “real” plan. This “real” plan is the ideal solution, which is referenced on page 20 of the Prime Minister’s response to the Foreign Affairs Committee, in which he envisages the political transition in Syria, allowing a new leadership and reform of the Syrian Arab Army, to enable it to tackle terrorist groups in defence of the Syrian nation. The Syrian Army fighting alongside the Free Syrian Army ideally need to be the forces that reclaim Syria for a new Syrian republic. However, we should not imagine for one minute that they can accomplish that task on their own. We need to influence the policy of our coalition partners and that of the whole international community to face up to the reality that that entails. This is the crucial issue: how would we, the United Kingdom, exercise the greatest influence? Everything that I have heard in the last month of taking evidence on this issue suggests that our role as a compromised and limited member of the coalition against ISIL, operating only in Iraq, weakens that influence.

We can debate the efficacy of airstrikes and the additional capability that Brimstone missiles bring to the whole coalition, but the truth is that we all know that those issues are marginal to the outcome. What is not marginal to the outcome is getting the international politics right. It is not in the interest of our country, or the people whom we represent, for this House to deny the Government the authority that they need today. I am now satisfied that the Government, who, along with the Americans, helped block the transition process by our preconditions on the role of Bashar al-Assad, can now play a critically constructive role in the transition.

Indeed, my criticism of today’s motion is that the Government should be seeking wider authority from the House. Limiting the targeting to ISIL and excluding al-Nusra and any future terrorist groups that will be listed by the United Nations, as envisaged under UN Security Council resolution 2249, is a restriction that I do not understand. If armed groups put themselves beyond recall in the judgment of both the International Syria Support Group and the UN Security Council, then our armed forces should be authorised to act within the law.

Equally, the limitation on deploying UK troops in ground combat operations shows a lack of foresight. We know that both Syrian and Iraqi armed forces will need the maximum possible help, which arguably should include the embedding of trainers in the fighting echelon capability. I am also talking about artillery and engineers, as well as comprehensive logistical service support, command and control and communications functions. Where will those come from? As this mission must succeed, the war-winning capabilities may need to be found from beyond the neighbouring Sunni countries. The whole of the United Nations, which includes us, may be required to provide that effective military capability.

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**Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP)** *rose—*

**Hon. Members:** Go on, give way.

**Crispin Blunt:** I am afraid that I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman. He is my colleague and friend, and he has made such an excellent impression on the Foreign Affairs Committee so far. If there is time at the end, I will take his intervention.

However, if the Government have chosen a path that will require them to come back to the House for more authority, then that is the Government’s choice. To my mind, ISIL is such a clear and present danger to the civilised world that if all necessary means are endorsed by the Security Council, then we should endorse them too.

The Foreign Affairs Committee will continue our inquiry into the international strategy to defeat ISIL and, on behalf of this House, to hold the Government to account in full detail. The right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who is unwell but hopefully in recovery—we wish her a speedy recovery—has communicated to me that she will be supporting the Government this evening. It does not take much guessing to know which side the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) will be on this evening. In my judgment, this House will best discharge its responsibilities by giving our Government the authority they need not just to act with our international partners against this horror, but to influence those partners to make the necessary compromises in their national objectives, and to ensure the collective security of all nations.

**Stephen Gethins:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I pay tribute to him for his work as Chairman of the Committee. We will not be in the same Lobby tonight, but I pay tribute to him none the less. Earlier on, he talked about where we should sit on this issue. It says in our report that, during our evidence, several witnesses suggested that by participating in military action against ISIL in Syria, the UK would compromise its diplomatic capability.

**Crispin Blunt:** We all have to come to our own conclusions. I say to him and to the House that nothing I have heard in the past month has pointed towards anything except the opposite of that conclusion. Ministers have been clear about that evidence. When we asked that question in every single country that we went to, we were told that the UK’s position was compromised by the fact that we were only half in and half out of the coalition. It is a position of no conceivable diplomatic benefit, and it is one that this House should rectify this evening.

Part of the Prime Minister’s challenge is that we were both in the House 12 years ago when another Prime Minister delivered an utterly compelling performance and we made the United Kingdom party to a disaster in the middle east. It is right that we should be mindful of our recent history, but we must not be hamstrung by it.

**1.58 pm**

**Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab):** This debate centres on national security and the safety of our constituents. There will be differences of view within and between every party in this House. In good faith and conscience, Members will reach different conclusions. Anyone who approaches today’s debate without the

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gravest doubts, reservations and anxieties simply has not been paying attention. We are sent here by our constituents to exercise our best judgment—each our own best judgment. This is a debate of contradictions.

The terms of today’s motion, echoing the UN resolution are stern, almost apocalyptic, about the threat, which is described as

“an unprecedented threat to international peace and security”.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) said, the proposal before us amounts to only a relatively minor extension of the action that we are already undertaking. We have been asked to agree to act in both Iraq and Syria, precisely because that is what Daesh does, and its headquarters are in Syria. We have been asked to make a further contribution to an existing international effort to contain Daesh from extending the mayhem and bloodshed that accompany its every move even more widely across the middle east.

Serious questions have been raised, and I respect those who raise them. There is unease about ground forces. There is proper concern about the strategy and endgame, about the aftermath, and about rebuilding. Some say simply that innocent people are more likely to be killed. Military action creates casualties, however much we try to minimise them. Should we, on those grounds, abandon action in Iraq, although we undertake it at the request of the Iraqi Government, and it seems to have made a difference? Should we take no further action against Daesh, which is killing innocent people, and striving to kill more, every day of the week, or should we simply leave that to others? Would we make ourselves a bigger target for a Daesh attack? We are a target; we will remain a target. There is no need to wonder about it—Daesh has told us so, and continues to tell us so with every day that passes. We may as well take it not just at its word but, indeed, at its deeds. It has sought out our fellow countrymen and women to kill, including aid workers and other innocents. Whatever we decide today there is no doubt that it will do so again, nor is the consequence of inaction simply Daesh controlling more territory and land. We have seen what happens when it takes control. The treatment, for example, of groups such as the Yazidis, in all its horror, should surely make us unwilling to contemplate any further extension of Daesh-controlled territory. Inaction too leads to death and destruction.

Quite separately, there are those, not opposed in principle to action, who doubt the efficacy of what is proposed: coalition action which rests almost wholly on bombing, they say, will have little effect. Well, tell that to the Kosovans, and do not forget that if there had not been any bombing in Kosovo perhaps 1 million Albanian Muslim refugees would be seeking refuge in Europe. Tell that to the Kurds in Kobane who, if memory serves, pleaded for international air support, without which they felt they would lose control to Daesh. Tell them in Sierra Leone that military action should always be avoided because there would be casualties. Their state and their peace were almost destroyed. It was British military action that brought them back from the brink.

Of course, that military action took place in conjunction with political and diplomatic activity, and I share the view that it is vital that such activity is substantially

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strengthened. I was heartened by what the Prime Minister told us today. Our conference called for a United Nations resolution before further action, and we now have a unanimous Security Council resolution. Moreover, that resolution calls on member states in explicit and unmistakeable terms to combat the Daesh threat “by all means” and

“to eradicate the safe haven they have established”

in Iraq and Syria.

Although it speaks of the need to pursue the peace process, the UN resolution calls on member states to act now. Moreover, our French allies have explicitly asked us for such support. I invite the House to consider how we would feel, and what we would say, if what took place in Paris had happened in London and if we explicitly asked France for support and France refused.

**George Kerevan:** Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab):** I am sorry, no.

These are genuinely extremely difficult as well as extremely serious decisions, but it is the urgings of the United Nations and of the socialist Government in France that, for me, have been the tipping point in my decision to support military action.

**2.5 pm**

**Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con):** I refer the House to the amendment standing in my name and that of other hon. Members.

There are many Members on both sides of the House who feel that extending airstrikes to Syria is not a wise move in the absence of a long-term, realistic strategy, both military and non-military. Otherwise we risk repeating the errors that we made in Iraq, Helmand and Libya, and which we would have made only two years ago in the House if we had allowed the Government to intervene on behalf of the rebels. That strategy must include a comprehensive lay-out of military plans. Thought must be given to, and plans made for, the aftermath—and, indeed, an exit strategy.

Many of the questions that we have asked remain unanswered. We all accept that there are no easy answers in foreign policy—just a series of tough decisions—but there has to be respect on both sides for the views held. One or two people have suggested that one is playing politics or personalities with this issue. I refer them to my voting record on Iraq, my opposition to the extension of the Afghan mission to Helmand, my opposition to Libya and, indeed, my position two years ago in the House when we were asked to support a proposal on arming the rebels and striking Assad.

I have been called a pacifist and worse; I refer those people to my military record—as a soldier, I have the medals to prove that I am certainly not a pacifist—and to my record in Northern Ireland as a platoon commander in the 1980s.

**Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con):** I have huge respect for my hon. Friend. As a military man, does he agree that in all military operations throughout history the first thing that goes wrong on day one is the plan? However, that should not stop us making the effort and hopefully succeeding in the end. We hope a peaceful solution can finally be found.

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**Mr Baron:** I would not disagree with my hon. Friend at all, but we owe it to those participating in any military action to think through the plans carefully, to make sure that they are as realistic and comprehensive as possible; otherwise, we risk repeating past errors.

**Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con):** I have huge respect for my hon. Friend and for his military record. He makes eloquent points about the complexity of the situation and seeking a political solution in the end, but the protection of our people and their safety on our streets have to come first.

**Mr Baron:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. There are many Members on both sides of the House who oppose the Government on the extension of military strikes and who believe that that is the case. We should not forget that some of us supported the initial deployment to Afghanistan in 2001, on the basis that there was a clearly laid out strategy. I do not see such a strategy in this plan, and that is why we have to ask these questions and try to get some answers.

Perhaps the most damning accusation against those of us who say that we do not want to support the extension of military airstrikes is that we are sitting on our hands. They say that we do not want to do anything and want to stick our heads in the sand. Many of us believe in the need for military action to take on terrorists. Many of us supported that initial deployment to Afghanistan in 2001, and we succeeded very quickly—within a couple of years. Where we had trouble with Afghanistan is when the mission morphed into one of nation building, when we did not realise what we were getting into and did not have the resources to back it up.

We need a long-term strategy, so what should that be? What should it include? It is no good saying we need one if we have no idea what it should be. Let me give some examples. Let us talk about the non-military aspect. We have been talking in this place about disrupting Daesh’s financial flows and business interests for at least a year, if not 18 months. There has been no noticeable disruption of those business interests or financial flows. We have command of the skies in Syria. Why are we not disrupting those business and financial interests? There has never been a real answer to that. Why are we not doing more to disrupt Daesh’s prominence on social media? Again, we have talked about it in this place many times, but I do not see any evidence that that prominence is being disrupted. That is something we should tackle.

Above all, we should be tackling the ideology and the sectarianism that feeds the extremism that these groups, including Daesh, feed off. That is a long-term strategy—we cannot do it overnight—but again, I do not see much evidence of it. Where are those awkward questions to our allies in the region about feeding this extremism? We are not getting that message across.

I come back to a point that has been raised before, courtesy of the Foreign Affairs Committee’s recent visit to the middle east. We managed to get back only on Thursday morning, in time for the Prime Minister’s statement. I refer to the mythical 70,000 troops. We all know, and all accept, that ISIL cannot be bombed out of existence through airstrikes alone. It will take ground forces, but everybody is having trouble identifying what those ground forces should be and who should supply them.

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We visited various capitals—Tehran, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi—and spoke to a lot of experts across a wide range of fields. The point that kept coming across was the belief that there are very few moderates remaining in Syria after five years of civil war. But even if we believed the 70,000 figure, even if we believed they were all moderates, what the strategy does not address—I have asked this question before and I have not had an answer—is this: once these moderates have somehow been told miraculously to swing round, stop fighting Assad and take on Daesh, what is stopping them splintering into 100 or even 1,000 militias, as we saw in Libya? We ignore the lessons of Libya at our cost. What we were being told on the ground only last week is that this is not a homogenous group by any stretch of the imagination, and that those troops are just as liable to turn on each other as on an enemy, if they are set on doing so.

**Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab):** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Baron:** I am sorry. I have allowed two interventions and I must now crack on. We should also draw the lessons from Iraq. We are struggling to defeat Daesh in Iraq, and that is with 800,000 or 900,000—estimates vary—security forces on our payroll. One strategy we could employ is to finish the job in Iraq before we start thinking about any long-term strategy in Syria, but again, we are struggling. That is one of the fundamental differences between Iraq and Syria.

On the issue of sitting at the top table, this was a strong message when we were visiting the middle east. We are already at the top table. China does not intend to intervene, yet it sits at the top table in Vienna as a member of the P5. We would do so also, and it is clear that we are showing solidarity with our partners.

In conclusion, the short-term effects of British airstrikes will be marginal. Most people accept that, but as we intervene more we become more responsible for events on the ground and lay ourselves open to the unintended consequences of the fog of war. Without a comprehensive strategy, airstrikes will simply reinforce the west’s long-term failure in the region generally at a time when there are already too many aircraft chasing too few targets. Just as in previous ill-advised western interventions, a strong pattern emerges: time and again the Executive make a convincing case, often with supporting intelligence sources, and time and again they turn out to be wrong.

Just a few weeks ago, the Foreign Affairs Committee produced a very reasonable, reasoned and thoughtful report arguing against airstrikes in Syria in the absence of a comprehensive long-term strategy. Returning from my travels, I, like other colleagues, still hold to that view. It was the decision of the Committee last night that the Prime Minister had not adequately answered or addressed our concerns. So I will oppose this military action and intend to move the amendment in my name and that of other hon. Members. We have stood at this very point before. We should have no excuse for repeating our errors and setting out on the same tragic, misguided path once more.

**2.16 pm**

**Alan Johnson (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron). During my time in

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Parliament, it has become a convention that this House authorises military action, whereas previously it was for a Prime Minister to do so under the guise of royal prerogative. Sometimes they would involve the House of Commons; most often they did not. This new convention places a responsibility on Members of Parliament to weigh up the arguments and vote according to their conscience, rather than a parliamentary Whip.

I am not sure if other parties are whipped on this vote or not, but I am pretty sure that nobody in any part of this House would seek to justify their vote tonight by pleading that although they disagreed or agreed with the proposition, the Whip forced them to vote the way they did. On votes such as this, the Whip is irrelevant, except to Front Benchers, perhaps. Although I am grateful to the shadow Cabinet for the free vote my party has been afforded, I do not think it will make the slightest difference to the way we make our decision.

I intend to vote for the motion this evening for one basic reason: I believe that ISIL/Daesh poses a real and present danger to British citizens, and that its dedicated external operations unit is based not in Iraq, where the RAF is already fully engaged, but in Syria. This external operations unit is already responsible for killing 30 British holidaymakers on a beach in Sousse, and a British rock fan who perished along with 129 others in the Paris atrocity a few weeks ago.

It is true that this unit could have moved out of Raqqa, but that is not what the intelligence services believe. The fact is that just as al-Qaeda needed the safe haven it created for itself in Afghanistan to plan 9/11 and other atrocities, so ISIL/Daesh needs its self-declared caliphate to finance, train, organise and recruit to its wicked cause. Yes, there may be cells elsewhere, but there is little doubt that the nerve centre is in Raqqa. Just over 14 months ago, this House sanctioned military action in Iraq against ISIL/Daesh by 524 votes to 43. Nobody expected that action to bring about a swift end to the threat from ISIL; indeed, the Prime Minister, responding to an intervention, said that

“this mission will take not just months, but years”—[*Official Report*, 26 September 2014; Vol. 585, c. 1257.]

Many right hon. and hon. Members felt at that time that it was illogical to allow the effectiveness of our action to be diminished by a border that ISIL/Daesh did not recognise. We were inhibited by the absence of a specific UN resolution, so there was some justification for this House confining its response to one part of ISIL-held territory in September 2014. There can surely be no such justification in December 2015—no such justification after Paris, given the request for help from our nearest continental neighbour and close ally in response to the murderous attack that took place on 13 November; and no such justification after UN Security Council resolution 2249.

Paragraph 5 of the resolution, which was unanimously agreed,

“Calls upon Member States that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures…to eradicate the safe haven they”—

ISIL-Daesh—

“have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria”.

**George Kerevan:** I put to the right hon. Gentleman the point that I would have put to the right hon.

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Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett): a similar call from France was met by Germany, which sent reconnaissance aircraft but refused to bomb.

**Alan Johnson:** Germany is constrained by its history. The point I am making is that we in this Parliament, having authorised military action by the RAF in Iraq, can no longer justify not responding to recent events by extending our operations to Syria. If we ignore the part of resolution 2249 that I have just read out, we will be left supporting only the pieties contained in the other paragraphs; we will unequivocally condemn, express deepest sympathy, and reaffirm that those responsible must be held to account. In other words, this country will be expressing indignation while doing nothing to implement the action unanimously agreed in a motion that we, in our role as chair of the Security Council, helped formulate.

Furthermore, there is no argument against our involvement in attacking ISIL/Daesh in Syria that cannot be made against our action in Iraq, where we have helped to prevent ISIL’s expansion and to reclaim 30% of the territory it occupied. As the Prime Minister set out in his response to the Foreign Affairs Committee, that means that RAF Tornadoes, with the special pods that are so sophisticated that they gather 60% of the coalition’s tactical reconnaissance information in Iraq, can be used to similar effect in Syria, so long as another country then comes in to complete the strike. That is a ridiculous situation for this country to be in.

**Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab):** Is not the different between Iraq and Syria the fact that we have on the ground in Iraq a long-established ally, the Kurdish peshmerga, who want to work with us? We do not have that in Syria; we have there what the Prime Minister is now describing as a patchwork.

**Alan Johnson:** My hon. Friend, as always, makes an important point. I have just re-read the *Hansard* report of our debate in September 2014, and this point was not raised by anyone. The question of what comes next, which is a very important consideration—concerns have been expressed on both sides of the House—must not stop us responding to what happened in Paris and to the UN resolution’s request for all countries with the capability to act now. The resolution did not say to delay; it said to act now.

I do not think that anybody in this House believes that defeating the motion tonight will somehow remove us from the line of fire—that ISIL/Daesh and its allies will consider us no longer a legitimate target for its barbaric activities. The 102 people murdered in Ankara were attending a peace rally. The seven plots foiled by our security services so far this year were all planned before this motion was even conceived. Our decision tonight will not alter ISIL/Daesh’s contempt for this country and our way of life by one iota, but it could affect its ability to plan and execute attacks. If our decision does not destroy ISIL/Daesh’s capability in Syria, it will force its external operations unit to move and, in so doing, make it more exposed and less effective.

The motion presents a package of measures that will be taken forward by the international community to bring about the transformation in Syria that we all want to see, and it promised regular updates on that

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aspect. Furthermore, I believe that the motion meets the criteria that many Members will have set for endorsing military action now that the convention applies: is it a just cause? Is the proposed action a last resort? Is it proportionate? Does it have a reasonable prospect of success? Does it have broad regional support? Does it have a clear legal base? I think that it meets all those criteria.

I find this decision as difficult to make as anyone. Frankly, I wish I had the self-righteous certitude of the finger-jabbing representatives of our new and kinder type of politics, who will no doubt soon be contacting those of us who support the motion tonight. I believe that ISIL/Daesh must be confronted and destroyed if we are properly to defend our country and our way of life, and I believe that this motion provides the best way to achieve that objective.

**2.25 pm**

**Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** Hon. Members are being asked to back airstrikes against Daesh in order to show solidarity with our French and American friends, yet a gesture of solidarity, however sincerely meant, cannot be a substitute for hard-headed strategy.

Most Defence Committee members probably intend to vote for such airstrikes, but I shall vote against airstrikes, in the absence of credible ground forces, as ineffective and potentially dangerous, just as I voted against the proposal to bomb Assad in 2013. Indeed, the fact that the British Government wanted to bomb first one side and then the other in the same civil war, and in such a short space of time, illustrates to my mind a vacuum at the heart of our strategy.

At least we are now targeting our deadly Islamist enemies, rather than trying to bring down yet another dictator with the same likely results as in Iraq and Libya. Daesh must indeed be driven out of its territory militarily, but that can be done only by a credible force that is ready and able to do the fighting on the ground. So who will supply that force, without which airstrikes cannot prevail?

The failure of the ineptly named “Arab spring” in so many countries shows the two most likely outcomes: a victory for authoritarian dictatorship on the one hand, or a victory for revolutionary Islamism on the other. Moderation and democracy have barely featured in the countries affected, and Syria seems to be no exception. I am genuinely sorry to say that we face a choice between very nasty authoritarians and Islamist totalitarians; there is no third way.

Our Government, however, are in denial about that. They do concede that airstrikes must be in support of ground forces, and they have come up with a remarkable figure, from the Joint Intelligence Committee, of 70,000 so-called moderate fighters with whom we can supposedly co-ordinate our airstrikes. It is very doubtful, however, were such an alliance to be successful, that the territory freed from Daesh would cease to be under Islamist control.

**Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP):** Can the right hon. Gentleman comment specifically on the independent reports indicating that the Free Syrian Army is currently selling supplied weapons to Daesh in its own fight against Assad?

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**Dr Lewis:** It is certainly true that there have been well documented cases of such weapons ending up in the hands of Daesh, although I would not wish to tar the entire Free Syrian Army with what some of its factions might have done, or in fact have done, as the hon. Lady rightly suggests.

**Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab):** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dr Lewis:** In a moment.

In an attempt to try to establish the facts about the 70,000, I made inquiries of two people whose expert opinion I much admire. One is the writer and journalist Patrick Cockburn, who is one of Britain’s leading commentators on Syria and Iraq and who was one of the first to write about the threat from what was then called ISIS, long before it captured Mosul. This is what he tells me:

“Unfortunately, the belief that there are 70,000 moderate opposition fighters on the ground in Syria is wishful thinking. The armed opposition is dominated by Isis or al-Qaeda type organisations. There are many small and highly fragmented groups of opposition fighters who do not like Assad or Isis and could be described as non-extremist, but they are generally men from a single clan, tribe or village. They are often guns for hire and operate under licence from the al-Qaeda affiliate, the al-Nusra Front, or its near equivalent, Ahrar al-Sham. Many of these groups seek to present a moderate face abroad but remain violently sectarian and intolerant inside Syria.”

**Crispin Blunt:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Dr Lewis:** No, I am sorry—I promised to give way to the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham).

**Mr Cunningham:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is a ridiculous situation where on the one hand the Government praise the Kurds, but on the other hand the Government’s ally, Turkey, is attacking the Kurds? How much more ridiculous can you get?

**Dr Lewis:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that contribution. It is not only ridiculous but highly dangerous. I will insert at this point something I was going to leave out, and say in passing that to have separate conflicts going on within the same battlespace, without reaching a proper agreement, can lead us into all sorts of nasty confrontations—the worst of which would be if we ended up eyeball to eyeball with the Russians when they and we share the same common enemy in ISIL/Daesh.

The second expert I consulted was our former ambassador to Syria, Peter Ford, who describes the Free Syrian Army as

“a ragbag of 58 factions (at the last count) united mainly by a desire to use the FSA appellation in order to secure Gulf, Turkish and Western funding…most of the factions, which are extremely locally based, have no interest whatsoever in being drawn into battles against groups which basically share their sectarian agenda hundreds of miles away in areas with which they are unfamiliar.”

So instead of having dodgy dossiers we now have bogus battalions of moderate fighters.

Once Daesh has been driven out, as it must be driven out—if, eventually, we get an overall military strategy together, which adding a few bombing raids does not comprise—there arises the question of the occupying power, because an occupying power will have to remain

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in control for many years to come if other Islamists are not going to take over from Daesh. That occupying force must be a Muslim one, and only the Syrian Government army is likely to provide it. Indeed, as the Prime Minister himself acknowledged in the Commons,

“in time the best ground troops should be the Syrian army”.—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 1501.]

Airstrikes alone are a dangerous diversion and distraction. What is needed is a grand military alliance involving not only the west but Russia and, yes, its Syrian Government clients too. We need—

**Crispin Blunt** *rose—*

**Dr Lewis:** We need—[Hon. Members: “Give way!”] I honestly think that my hon. Friend, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, has had more than his fair share in this debate, and I am going to make use of mine.

We need to choose the lesser of two evils and abandon the fiction of a cosy third choice. There is now a general consensus that the decision to remove Saddam Hussein was a terrible mistake, but Saddam Hussein was every bit as much of a vicious dictator as we are told that Assad is. So ask yourself this when you are thinking about the hard choice that has to be faced tonight: you may feel pious looking back on the wrong decision that was made about Saddam Hussein, but a very similar decision confronts us tonight. It is a question of choosing the lesser of two evils, not fooling ourselves that there is a cosy third option, which is, in reality, a fantasy.

**2.35 pm**

**Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab):** No Parliament ever takes a more serious decision than what we should do to protect the security and safety of our nation and whether to put our forces in harm’s way. I know that every Member of the House will be weighing that decision very seriously, not least because the truth is that we have got those decisions wrong before, and our Governments have got those decisions wrong before, when we went into Iraq in 2003, but also when we failed to intervene early enough in Bosnia a decade before that.

Since the Prime Minister made his case last Thursday, I have raised a series of questions and sought a series of assurances, some of which I have received and some of which I have not. I do not believe that the Prime Minister has made the most effective case, and so I understand why many in this House feel that they are not yet convinced, but I also feel that I cannot say that the coalition airstrikes that are already under way in both Syria and Iraq should stop. If they are not going to stop, and France has asked for our help, I do not think that we can say no. I think that changes need to be made to the Government’s approach, and I will argue for them. I think that there are more limits in the approach they need to take, but I will also vote with the Government on the motion tonight, even though I recognise how difficult that is for so many of us.

The whole House, I think, agrees that we need a strategy that delivers peace and defeats ISIS/Daesh, but I disagree with any suggestion that this can be done as an ISIS-first, or Daesh-first, approach, because that simply will not work. In the end, we know that the

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Vienna process—the process to replace the Assad regime, which is dropping barrel bombs on so many innocent people across Syria—is crucial to preventing recruitment for ISIS. If we or the coalition are seen somehow to be siding with Assad or strengthening Assad, that will increase recruitment for Daesh as well.

I disagree with the suggestion that there are 70,000 troops who are going to step in and that the purpose of the airstrikes is to provide air cover for those troops to be able to take on and defeat Daesh, because that is not going to happen any time soon. We know that there are not such forces anywhere near Raqqa. We know too that those forces are divided. The airstrikes will not be part of an imminent decisive military campaign.

But I also disagree with those who say that instead of “ISIS first”, we should have “Vienna first”, and wait until the peace process is completed in order to take airstrike action against Daesh. I think the coalition airstrikes are still needed. We know that ISIS is not going to be part of the peace process: it will not negotiate; it is a death cult that glorifies suicide and slaughter. We know too that it has continuous ambitions to expand and continuous ambitions to attack us and attack our allies—to have terror threats not just in Paris, not just in Tunisia, but all over the world, anywhere that it gets the chance. It holds oil, territory and communications that it wants to use to expand. The coalition cannot simply stand back and give it free rein while we work on that vital peace process.

Coalition airstrikes already involve France, Turkey, Jordan, the US, Morocco, Bahrain and Australia. If we have evidence that communication networks are being used to plan attacks in Paris, Berlin, Brussels or London, can we really say that such coalition airstrikes should not take place to take out those communication networks? If we have evidence that supply routes are being used by this barbaric regime to plan to take over more territory and expand into a wider area, do we really think that coalition airstrikes should not take out those supply routes? If we think that coalition airstrikes should continue, can we really say no, when France, having gone through the terrible ordeal of Paris, says it wants our help in continuing the airstrikes now?

I have continually argued in this place and elsewhere for our country to do far more to share in the international support for refugees fleeing the conflict. I still think we should do much more, not just leave it to other countries. The argument about sanctuary also applies to security. I do not think that we can leave it to other countries to take the strain. I cannot ignore the advice from security experts that without coalition airstrikes over the next 12 months, the threat from Daesh—in the region, but also in Europe and in Britain—will be much greater.

I think we have to do our bit to contain the threat from Daesh: not to promise that we can defeat or overthrow it in the short term, because we cannot do so, but at least to contain it. It is also important to ensure we degrade its capacity to obliterate the remaining moderate and opposition forces, however big they may be. When the Vienna process gets moving properly, there must be some opposition forces; the peace debate cannot simply involve Assad and Daesh as the only forces left standing, because that will never bring peace and security to the region.

If we are to do our bit and to take the strain, we need more limited objectives than those the Prime Minister has set out—to act in self-defence and to support the

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peace process, but not just to create a vacuum for Assad to sweep into. That makes the imperative to avoid civilian casualties even greater. Where there is any risk that people are being used as human shields to cover targets, such airstrikes should not go ahead however important the targets. It makes the imperative of civilian protection even greater, but that is not mentioned in the Government’s motion. It should be the central objective not just for humanitarian reasons—to end the refugee crisis—but to prevent the recruitment that fuels ISIS.

I also think there should be time limits, because I do not support an open-ended commitment to airstrikes until Daesh is defeated—the Foreign Secretary raised that yesterday—because if it is not working in six months or if it proves counterproductive, we should be ready to review this, and we should also be ready to withdraw. We will need to review this. I think we should lend the Government support tonight and keep it under review, not give them an open-ended commitment that this should carry on whatever the consequences.

Finally, I say to the Government that I accept their argument that if we want coalition airstrikes on an international basis, we should be part of that, but I urge them to accept my argument that we should do more to be part of providing sanctuary for refugees fleeing the conflict. There are no easy answers, but I also say, in the interests of cohesion in our politics and in our country, that the way in which we conduct this debate is immensely important. However we vote tonight, none of us is a terrorist sympathiser and none of us will have blood on our hands. The blood has been drawn by ISIS/Daesh in Paris and across the world, and that is who we must stand against.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Mr Speaker:** Order. A five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now apply.

**2.44 pm**

**Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con):** There has been a great deal of talk about our solidarity with our French allies following the horrific events in Paris. While it is all very well metaphorically to stand alongside our allies, we make a mockery of solidarity if we refuse to fly alongside them in the skies over Syria. More than that, we make a mockery of our own credibility if we ignore UN Security Council resolution 2249, which has been secured unanimously. Having called upon the world community to take action, and given the comprehensive and strategic argument that the Prime Minister has put forward, we cannot ignore that call and expect our international partners to look at us with any shred of respect or good will. How can we ourselves have any self-respect if we leave this fight to brave Kurdish women fighting with antiquated weapons?

However, this issue is not all about national pride, living up to our responsibilities or our own self-respect; it is about keeping British people safe—those at risk of being murdered by terrorists and those at risk of being brainwashed into joining them—and we are already doing that. I welcome the Prime Minister’s announcement that £5 million will go towards the establishment of a new Commonwealth unit to counter extremism, and his announcement today of a comprehensive review to root out those funding extremists in the UK.

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According to Oxford University’s Professor Scott Atran, 95% of Daesh recruits are signed up by friends and family, and there are few things more dangerous than misfits who feel they can live outside the law being recruited by the lure of Daesh. It is one of the most barbaric and strategically dangerous enemies we have ever faced. Its ability to recruit ordinary westerners, its commitment to transforming them into murderers and suicide bombers, and its lack of mercy to any man, woman or child are unparalleled. It rapes, enslaves and decapitates. Its victims are Muslims, Kurds, Yazidis, Syrian, French and British. Committing acts of atrocity is how it sustains its image of invincibility, and its growth depends on a steady beat of battlefield victories, with looting along the way. It craves headlines that reinforce its apocalyptic propaganda—so much so that the manager of an electronics store in Raqqa said that Daesh loses popularity among ordinary, uneducated people when it loses its brilliant victories. For me, that is at the heart of this argument.

The very destruction of the caliphate state is in itself the right thing to do, because its existence, along with its self-proclaimed caliph and the nonsense that it has fulfilled Wahabi prophecy, makes up its ideology.

**Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con):** I am enjoying listening to my hon. Friend develop her points. Does she agree that the motion is not about military action alone and in isolation, but about a broader strategy?

**Nusrat Ghani:** Indeed. Tonight’s motion is not just about military intervention, but about humanitarian and diplomatic relations.

We must break the umbilical cord that acts as an anchor from Raqqa and offers the seduction of salvation and destruction to the already damaged minds of westerners and middle easterners alike. Until we can demonstrate that we can scar and humiliate Daesh, we will not be taken seriously by those who are attracted to doing its bidding. Raqqa is its command and control centre. It is from there that it plans its trilogies of terror: to control parts of Syria and Iraq; to establish wilayats, or provinces, like the ones that have already been declared in Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan; and, closer to home, to create command and control cells in Europe.

Caliphates cannot exist as underground movements because they are founded on territorial authority, so to destroy the caliphate and its pull, we must take away its command of territory. To do that we must take military action, because those in Daesh cannot be negotiated with. They are not going to sit at a table and agree a 10-point plan for a political settlement, so the fight has to be taken to them, but I have not met anyone opposed to airstrikes who is willing to go over and negotiate with them. We have nothing they want: they want only our demise. They recently said:

“We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women”.

As a Muslim woman, I stand with people of all faiths who abhor Daesh’s ideology, rhetoric and actions. We are justified in taking action to destroy them: they are a threat and they will not rest until they have destroyed us and everything we stand for. For that reason, I will vote in favour of the Government’s motion this evening.

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**2.49 pm**

**Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab):** There is a group of us on the Labour Benches who are caught between two points: we are not opposed to taking action—indeed, we want to take action—but we do not feel that the strategy is in place.

We are making a decision today based not just on airstrikes, but on an overall strategy. Let me say from the outset that I am under no illusion that there is a perfect strategy, given the complex circumstances of the civil war and insurgency in Syria. There is no certainty in the middle east. We all want to protect our citizens and reduce the threat of Daesh, but I am afraid that a few more airstrikes will not do that. Some of its actions may not even be planned from Syria. We lack an overall strategy to confront ISIS/Daesh, which is established in other countries such as Libya. I want to make it clear again that I am not opposed to military action, but I will support it only if I believe that there is a reasonable chance of success.

I do not believe the argument that bombing Daesh in Syria will somehow greatly increase the chances of a terrorist attack in the UK, nor the argument that the Government are proposing the indiscriminate bombing of Syrians. Those arguments are both wrong.

I understand the argument that we are currently restricted to Iraq, but we were clearly invited into that country by an elected Government and we have forces on the ground. That is not the situation in Syria, which is much more uncertain and complex. We do not have the ground forces in Syria that I believe we should have.

**Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con):** The hon. Gentleman and I visited Iraq together last year. The fact of the matter is that the Iraqi army is totally destroyed. There were no ground forces in Iraq, leaving aside the peshmerga, any more than there are ground forces in Syria.

**Derek Twigg:** I do not think we can leave aside the peshmerga. The hon. Gentleman may also recall that the Sunnis need arming in Iraq. The Prime Minister keeps agreeing to do that and saying that it is the right thing to do, but we never hear what happens about it. There is therefore a lot more that we could be doing in Iraq. The fact is that there are armed forces that we support, whether the peshmerga or the Iraqi army, on the ground in Iraq when we carry out airstrikes. That is the difference with Syria.

The Prime Minister says that it is important that we stand by our allies. That argument has been stressed to me by some of my colleagues who support the Government’s position. It is a strong point. My response is that doing the right thing must be the primary reason for our decision. Does the strategy proposed by the Government add up? After all, the French, who are an important ally, did not support our decision to go into Iraq. That was a perfectly reasonable position for them to take because they did not think it was the right thing to do. That comes back to my point that we must do the right thing. It is also said that we should not rely on our allies to bomb Syria, but it is not as if we are doing nothing. As I have said, we are doing a lot in Iraq.

On the issue of whether there are 70,000 Syrian opposition fighters on the ground, we know that a large number of those groups are less than moderate and

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more Islamic, as the Foreign Secretary said yesterday. There remains considerable uncertainty about how reliable they will be in the fight and what they might bring to any peace negotiations or future Government. Many of the moderates are simply fleeing Syria.

The Prime Minister, in his speech last week, set out the progress of the coalition’s actions in Syria. I welcome the fact that there has been progress. There was also progress at the International Syria Support Group meeting in Vienna. The pathway leading to elections, which the Prime Minister set out, is not tied down. It still leaves the question of what to do about Assad.

The Prime Minister’s memorandum to the Foreign Affairs Committee stated that there were “differences to resolve”. Yesterday, I asked the Foreign Secretary what those differences were. By way of example, he said that the Russians want to shore up the Assad regime to take on Daesh. That is a pretty big difference from where we are.

Finally, I come to the issue of ground troops, which some opponents of military action will use as cover for not doing anything. That is certainly not my position. I have been consistent on this matter from the start. It is a major stumbling block to my support for the motion. We should look at the example of Iraq, where a concerted campaign against al-Qaeda using drones and US and UK special forces had considerable success. However, that also involved a surge of tens of thousands of American troops on the ground.

The Government have said that ground troops will be needed, but they do not say when and have ruled out the use of British ground troops. It appears wrong to embark on this strategy without having any ground troops or a coherent explanation of when there will be some, who they will be or how many there will be. What assessment have the Government made of the number of ground troops that will be needed and what other military assets will be needed?

It gets more complicated, because the Government say that there is no military solution and that only a political solution will stop the civil war in Syria. What if Assad refuses to go? Is that realistic? I do not believe that we can have one without the other. I am clear that the UN needs to agree to put a huge coalition force in the hundreds of thousands into Syria to stop the civil war and maintain safe areas, while at the same time putting in place a political strategy that is achievable. Preferably, as many Muslim countries as possible should send in their soldiers. A firm deal with Russia and Iran will be needed.

The Government have not convinced me that there is a wider strategy or that this action has a reasonable chance of success. Instead, I think we will have to gradually up our involvement in a piecemeal way and that we will find ourselves in a much more complex situation even than Iraq. I disagree with those in the Government who argue that we would somehow make ourselves less secure by not taking such action. I would support action if I felt that it was feasible and deliverable. At the same time, the Government have cut our armed forces and our police force, which are important in maintaining our security.

I believe that ISIL/Daesh needs to be confronted. It must be defeated ideologically and militarily. It is therefore essential to our security and that of the middle east that

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the Prime Minister comes forward with a strategy that has a reasonable chance of success. He has not done so today and he must come back with a better plan.

**2.55 pm**

**Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con):** This may be the kiss of death for them, but I congratulate the right hon. Members for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) and for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) on three formidable speeches. It always takes incredible courage to stand against one’s party and they should not be denigrated for doing so.

I support the Government’s motion. I fully understand all the caveats of one kind or another that colleagues have put forward, but the most important immediate issue is making the strikes against Daesh in Syria that our intelligence and security agencies have identified and wish to carry out, because it offers a present threat to us, our constituents and our allies in Europe. This is a present threat. They may not get it entirely right. I can see my right hon. Friend for—what is his constituency? *[Interruption.]* I have so many friends! It would be wrong to name them all, but they think that there is no direct threat as far as intelligence is concerned. Those colleagues who have received briefings of one kind or another understand that. The intelligence and security services cannot guarantee to prevent every threat. We should support the motion primarily because we wish to extend our air campaign into Syria to help prevent the threats to this country.

Secondly, I am mindful that the elephant in the room is the Iraq war. We tend to look back to previous wars to draw lessons of one kind or another. The Prime Minister is absolutely right that we have to look at the present situation and the future. Hopefully, we have learned lessons, both political and military, from that war, but we can end up having our current operations and politics determined by past experiences.

Our predecessors sat in the Commons in the 1930s, determined never to have a great war again. The Labour party was divided—there were pacifists and those who wanted collective security. My party supported appeasement, as did the overwhelming majority of the British public, because they genuinely—these were not evil men and women—wanted to prevent another war. They failed, of course, because they were dealing with people in other countries who were not prepared to negotiate. The lessons learned from that war were used in 1956. Anthony Eden believed that Nasser was another Mussolini. He was therefore prepared to take action, but it was the wrong action at the time. I believe that we should put aside where we stood on other campaigns and look at what the situation is today.

My final point is that there has been a great debate about the 70,000 moderate or immoderate people who might or might not provide ground forces. I am sure that the leader of the SNP is, even as we speak, getting YouGov to go out and ask them whether they consider themselves to be moderates or immoderates.

**Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab):** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Simpson:** I am sorry but I have almost run out of time.

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During the second world war, when Churchill and Roosevelt were looking at resistance in Europe, it was dreadfully difficult to find out whether people were communists, non-communists, or Gaullists of one kind or another. At the end of the day, their criterion was, “Are they fighting the Nazis?” There is no easy solution, but the Prime Minister has laid out a set of proposals as far as he can, and I urge the House to vote with him on this occasion.

**3 pm**

**Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP):** I thank the Prime Minister for the national security briefings that we have received, and the discussions that we have had with him and others in recent weeks. We are considering serious matters, and it is right for this debate to take place in a respectful way, both inside and outside the Chamber.

What has been proposed is the extension of action that is already taking place in Iraq, and the test for the DUP has been one of realism. Our experience in Northern Ireland has taught us that no other approach can be brought to bear when facing terrorism. Terrorism must be fought, and fought with all means realistically at our disposal. We have not sought this conflict; terrorists have inflicted it on us, and we must now respond. We know only too well the consequences of terrorism being appeased and indulged. Terrorism must be faced up to. This is not a choice between political initiatives and fighting terrorism, because both go hand in hand. That is why it is important that the motion is about action now.

Our case to the Prime Minister has been clear and consistent throughout, and four things were necessary for our support. First, we needed to know that the vile terrorists of Daesh/ISIL would be the target. That is explicit in the motion and I welcome that clear objective. We all know the convoluted complexity of the Syrian civil war, and today we are not being asked to take sides in that war; we are being asked to take the side of civilised people everywhere—the side of our own citizens. We are being asked to strike at the terrorists who have decided to wage war on us.

Secondly, we had to be sure that those people represent a clear and present danger to the United Kingdom and our own citizens, and nobody can be in any doubt whatsoever about that because our citizens are under threat of attack in the UK and abroad. Some say that this action will merely serve to increase that threat or bring violence and retaliation, but as we have heard again and again, in reality we are already at the top of the terrorist target list. The Russian airliner that was blown up over Egypt could just as easily have been a plane carrying British holidaymakers, and the fantastic work done by our security services in thwarting attack after attack illustrates the level of the threat against us.

Thirdly, we needed to be convinced that British action would make a real and practical difference. The Prime Minister is right to say that the proposed action will not in itself resolve the terrorist threat, but if it helps to reduce, degrade or lessen the threat to British citizens—and I believe it will—it would be utterly wrong not to act. We require an overall political and diplomatic strategic framework to address the underlying problems and work towards a settlement of the Syrian civil war, and those factors make the situation very different from the vote in 2013.

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I commend again the UK Government on the humanitarian support that they provide day in, day out to those fleeing conflict in Syria. It should not be forgotten in the midst of this debate that the UK is the second highest donor of such aid in the world, and British aid workers—backed up by massive British resources and in collaboration with our international partners—are providing enormous help to civilians and refugees in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. That, of course, should continue.

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** Does that not demonstrate that this debate is about one aspect of our strategy? It is not a purely military strategy.

**Mr Dodds:** The hon. Gentleman is right. Military intervention on its own will not solve the problem, and it must be part of an overall package. However, to say that we should wait until there is a political or diplomatic outcome is like saying that we should have waited 30 years for the Belfast agreement or the St Andrews agreement to bring about a settlement in Northern Ireland. We must protect our own citizens now when there is a real and present danger to them. Not to do so would be a dereliction of duty.

Paris, and the downing of the Russian airliner, were assaults on civilised values. If we can realistically do something to destroy or degrade that evil, and prevent it from spreading still further, we must act. That is a heavy burden of responsibility. This is not a choice between military intervention and political or diplomatic initiatives, because both go hand in hand. There is now a realistic chance that overwhelming pressure can be brought to bear against ISIL/Daesh in Syria, and therefore DUP Members will vote in favour of the motion.

Now that a British force is to be employed—if the House votes that way in the common good—it is the duty of every credible political figure to offer their full support to our armed forces. We wish our armed forces success as they do the hard and necessary work, and we pray for a safe and swift return for them all.

**3.5 pm**

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con):** A dangerous and deadly cult is operating within this country, within Europe, and on Europe’s doorstep, and today we will decide whether we duck our responsibilities and do nothing, or whether we extend our military operations and widen our attack on the territories that that cult has taken over. To widen our airstrikes to include Daesh-held areas in Syria is only a small extension of current military activity, and I honestly do not think that this House has ever seen a Prime Minister set out so clearly the detailed options before us today, and his reasons for asking us to support the motion.

In my view, to vote for this motion is to respond positively to the requests of our closest allies in France and the USA. It will add value to current military operations by providing the precision bombing capability and reconnaissance needed to degrade Daesh’s capabilities and remove its leadership, thereby reducing the direct threat to our citizens. That threat is real, present and extreme, and goes from beheading aid workers, to slaughtering holidaymakers on a Tunisian beach, not to

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mention the seven foiled terrorist attacks from which the brave men and women of our intelligence services and operations have saved us.

Anyone saying that a positive vote tonight will increase the danger here in the UK needs to wake up and realise that the threat is already here, and controlled by Daesh leaders, mostly in Syria. If we add to the forces trying to eliminate that Daesh leadership, we will increase the odds of removing those who orchestrate violence, terrorism and wholesale murder.

I could not support the Government today if I thought that airstrikes would form our strategy on Syria and Daesh in its entirety. However, with the Vienna process and a reasonable estimate of the ground forces that should be available to back up more efficient air activity, I believe that focused diplomacy and military action will complement each other in moving us forward to what we all want, which is a negotiated and peaceful settlement in Syria. Although I admit it is likely that airstrikes will not be enough to eliminate the threat of Daesh, it is important to recognise the role that they can play at this exact time.

Like many hon. Members, I have received representations from my constituents in Chesham and Amersham on both sides of the argument, but after that attack in Paris and the wholesale slaughter of many young people, it has resonated even more with the general public that Daesh is a dangerous force that must be defeated at its roots. As it stands, I think that the best course of action is for Britain to increase its commitment to this complex, difficult and continuing conflict, and thereby increase the odds of improving the safety of our country and of the British people wherever they are in the world.

The Prime Minister knows that we must constantly revise our plan for post-conflict Syria and the whole region, and if we want to see peace in our time, we will need to address that. Tonight I will be putting our security into the hands of our armed services, and I will support the motion.

**3.9 pm**

**Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD):** As has been mentioned already, the spectre of the 2003 Iraq war hangs over the debate in this House and in the whole country. In 2003, the late and very great Charles Kennedy led the opposition to the Iraq war and he did so proudly. That was a counterproductive and illegal war, and Daesh is a consequence of the foolish decision taken then. Charles Kennedy was also right, however, in calling, in the 1990s, for military intervention in Bosnia to end a genocide there. I am proud of Charles on both counts.

My instincts, like those of others, are always to be anti-war and anti-conflict. In many cases, the automatic instinct will be that we should react straightaway and go straight in. Others will say that under no terms, and not in my name, should there ever be intervention. It is right to look at this through the prism of what is humanitarian, what is internationalist, what is liberal, what is right and what will be effective. I set out five principles that I have put to the Prime Minister. I will not go into all of them here, with the time I have available, but they are available on the website and people can go and have a look at them. My very clear sense is that any reasonable person would judge them to have been broadly met.

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**James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con):** Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, he and his party supported airstrikes against Daesh in Iraq and that today’s vote is about extending those airstrikes across the border that Daesh itself does not recognise, into Syria, to degrade Daesh as far as possible?

**Tim Farron:** I am happy to confirm that.

For me, and probably for many other Members, this has been one of the toughest decisions, if not the toughest decision, I have had to take in my time in this place. The five principles that we have set out have been broadly met, but I will not give unconditional support to the Government as I vote with them tonight. There are huge questions on the financing of Daesh by states such as Turkey, with the trade that is going on there. There are huge questions on the protection of civilians. Yes, a ceasefire, as discussed in Vienna, is the ultimate civilian protection, but we absolutely must continue to press for safe zones to be established in Syria. I continue to be very concerned about the lack of political and state involvement, notwithstanding what the King of Jordan said overnight, by close-by regional states, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. I continue to be concerned about our failure to take our fair share of refugees, as part of the overall EU plan. I welcome what the Prime Minister said earlier, but I want a lot more than just “looking into” taking 3,000 orphan children from refugee camps. I want them here in Britain.

**Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP):** I am very grateful to the Liberal Democrat leader for giving way. Given that he has pressed so hard for the Government to take more refugees, why is he content to bomb that country when the Prime Minister has refused to give that assurance? This is ridiculous.

**Tim Farron:** I will come to that in a moment. The reality is that this is a very tough—an incredibly tough—call.

A final point I wanted to press the Prime Minister on concerns the funding of Daesh from within UK sources. I am very pleased to hear that there will now be a full public and open inquiry. It must cut off that which fuels this evil, evil death cult.

This is the toughest call I have ever had to make, certainly in this House. What pushes me in the direction of voting for action is, above all, United Nations resolution 2249, which calls for us to eradicate the safe haven that Daesh has in Syria. The resolution does not just permit, but urges this country and all members capable of doing so, to take all necessary action to get rid of Daesh. If we had just been asked to bomb Syria, I would be voting no: I would be out there demonstrating in between speeches and signing up to emails from the Stop the War coalition. This is not, however, a case of just bombing; this is standing with the United Nations and the international community to do what is right by people who are the most beleaguered of all. I was so proud and moved to tears when I watched at Wembley the other week English fans singing La Marseillaise—probably very badly indeed, but doing it with gusto—and standing shoulder to shoulder with our closest friends and allies. How could we then not act today, when asked to put our money where our mouth is?

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What has really pushed me into the position where I feel, on balance, that we have to back military action against Daesh is my personal experiences in the refugee camps this summer. I cannot pretend not to have been utterly and personally moved and affected by what I saw. I could give anecdote after anecdote that would break Members’ hearts, but let me give just one in particular. A seven-year-old lad was lifted from a dinghy on the beach at Lesbos. My Arabic interpreter said to me, “That lad has just said to his dad, ‘Daddy are ISIL here? Daddy are ISIL here?’” I cannot stand in this House and castigate the Prime Minister for not taking enough refugees and for Britain not standing as tall as it should in the world, opening its arms to the desperate as we have done so proudly for many, many decades and throughout our history, if we do not also do everything in our power to eradicate that which is the source of the terror from which people are feeling.

We are absolutely under the spectre of a shocking, illegal and counterproductive war in Iraq. It is a lesson from history that we must learn from. The danger today is that too many people will be learning the wrong lessons from history if we choose not to stand with those refugees and not to stand as part of the international community of nations. This is a very tough call, but on balance it is right to take military action to degrade and to defeat this evil death cult.

**3.16 pm**

**Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con):** I entirely endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), the leader of the Liberal Democrat party. Until we remove Daesh, we are all at risk. We are at risk with or without bombing in Iraq, and we are at risk with or without bombing in Syria.

I was in France and saw the stunned reaction of the French populace. There is no negotiation, as the Leader of the Opposition suggests, with those who gun down people going about their daily business and in restaurants, or those who take a bomb to a crowded football stadium. Removing Daesh, therefore, is an absolute priority. A large number of Members voted a year ago to bomb in Iraq. It is clearly a nonsense for our aeroplanes to stop at an arbitrary boundary in the sand. If we are invited by our severely damaged and hurt allies and neighbours, the French, to bring special technology, it is a terrible dereliction that we do not involve ourselves and offer that technology.

In the past couple of days, I have talked to some very experienced allied generals. There is no doubt whatever that having the UK playing a full part in a coalition, bringing intelligence, planning and experience, does give an intangible moral and philosophical boost to the campaign. I am clear that this is about the safety of our citizens. We are better off if we engage in this activity.

I would like to touch briefly on the artificial boundary. My right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) called these nation states. The entities of Syria and Iraq were created in the 1920s out of elements of the Ottoman empire. Iraq was made up of three old Ottoman vilayets: Basra, which is very Shi’a; Baghdad, which is mainly Sunni; and Mosul in Kurdistan. When the Kurds—there were about 19 million then and there are about 30 million now—emerged

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from the first world war, they were promised a country. They did not get one. We are living with the consequences of what was decided then.

I remember when I was at Cambridge the late Professor Jack Gallagher talking about the fat cats. France and Britain came out of the first world war with these new entities very much increasing their sphere of influence. It was always assumed that there would be British and French influence: passive military influence if necessary; very active military in the case of the bombing campaign in Iraq in the 1920s. This system worked until 1958, when the king was killed. It sort of worked under the horrendous dictatorships of Saddam Hussein and Assad père. It has broken down now. For all the criticism of the Iraq war, it could have worked. It was a terrible decision by the Obama regime to withdraw the US garrison. There are still US garrisons in west Germany, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. It should have been there for the long term.

**Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con):** The Americans withdrew, of course, because the Iraqis would not give a status of forces agreement under which US forces would not be liable to Iraqi law. That is why the Americans were forced to withdraw.

**Mr Paterson:** Yes, and I think the Administration were weak not to get their way on that. Of course, the Maliki regime, which was corrupt and sectarian, has now gone. What we need to look at now is how we make these entities work. Any expert on the area will say that it is not an option to destroy these boundaries.

What I would put to the Front-Bench—a line in the motion provides the grounds for this—is that we should follow what the current Prime Minister is doing in Iraq in talking about functioning federalism. We need to give these ethnic groups security within the old post-world war one boundaries. If we look at how the Ottomans did it, they basically left the locals to run their own show. There is a clear breakdown in Iraq whereby significant autonomy is provided within these entities, and this is already happening with the Kurds.

Given the terrible conditions under which local people are living, we will not get their support to remove Daesh if they do not feel that they will emerge at the end of this very difficult process with an entity to which they are loyal and feel safe in. Sunnis in Iraq will not stick their heads above the parapet if they think they will end up with another corrupt Maliki Shi’a regime. The same applies the other way round, because the Shi’a will not want to end up with another Saddam regime.

**Simon Hoare:** I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend on the point about federation. Trying to put the construct of a nation-state boundary on what are still tribal areas is almost impossible. It has clearly worked well in Yugoslavia, following the conflict there, and it is something that we should look towards.

**Mr Paterson:** My proposal is that we do not rearrange the post-world war one boundaries. We should work very closely with the locals in the Vienna negotiations, with the clear intent that at the end of the process, having removed Daesh by military means, we will have

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an entity that will allow local ethnic and religious groups to have real loyalty to the area where they live. If we do not do that, all the questions from the other side about the 70,000 and all the rest of it will arise. Of course there is doubt, because they are not prepared to stick their heads above the parapet until they know exactly where we are going and they know that they will emerge living in part of a federation where they can be loyal to the new entity.

I shall support the motion tonight, but I urge the Government in the Vienna negotiations to look at how to bring in the Sunni and other local powers in order to establish a long-term solution. We have to look to the long term; there is no short-term fix. Ultimately, there will have to be an international presence to help grow these local institutions, but we must build them around the local ethnic groups.

**3.22 pm**

**Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab):** No one voting against the Government’s motion is not bothered about the security of the United Kingdom and the people who live in it. We and our families all live in it. I therefore find the suggestion that those who intend to vote against the motion are terrorist sympathisers or are somehow pacifist extremely insulting.

As I mentioned earlier, I happened to be in Cairo, Amman and Beirut last week, which is important because the three countries concerned are currently fighting Daesh at their borders. What they have to say about what we in the United Kingdom can do to help fight Daesh needs to be heard in this Chamber. First, every single person agrees that extension of the airstrikes into Syria alone will not achieve anything without a massive boots on the ground presence. When I say “massive”, just taking back Raqqa, a city of about half a million people, would need an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 ground troops, along with air support, command and intelligence, headquarters, surveillance and so forth. That is just Raqqa. Then there is the challenge of how to hold the territory that has been taken. Unless and until the Prime Minister says that we are going to get those boots on the ground, whether from surrounding Arab countries or the international community, we are not being really serious about containing and destroying Daesh. We need both those strategies.

Let me make it clear that I have no sympathy with Daesh, because 99% of the people killed by Daesh and Assad are actually Muslims. The slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Muslims is taking place, so I as a Muslim have no truck with Daesh. I would happily support today’s motion if I genuinely believed that it was going to make a dent in Daesh and make the United Kingdom safer, which is an important point.

With all due respect to the Prime Minister and the Government, what I think is going on here is basically a symbolic gesture to show that we are in the international community and siding with France. Of course we were all devastated by what happened in Paris, but using that as the main reason to extend our involvement is wrong.

When I spoke to people in the middle east, apart from the armed troops, they thanked the UK for all the help we have provided to the Jordanians and to the Lebanese army and intelligence services, but they said that that sort of help has to be provided to the other countries involved, such as Nigeria, Mali, Kenya—poor

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countries that do not have the intelligence or capability to deal with al-Shabaab or Boko Haram. All those groups have to be dealt with.

Assad has to be out of the picture for there to be any settlement, so the Russians and the Iranians have to come on board. We also need Saudi Arabia and the other Muslim countries around the area to be involved. In fact, there has been a suggestion that ground forces of Sunni Arab nations should be the ones going in. But the people out there said that if we cannot get the Sunni Muslims in, that is fine: western troops would be fine too, because what we need to do is to control and stop Daesh.

Finally, General Hitit of the Lebanese army, a Christian Maronite, explained what was central to the whole issue. Some people may strike me down on this, but it was said that the Israel-Palestine conflict has to be the key. That was said not just in Beirut but in Cairo and Amman. It is key; it is a big recruitment driver. Until that situation is sorted out, there will never be peace in the middle east.

On the extension of airstrikes, General Sir Richard Shirreff, who was the allied deputy NATO commander, recently said that the Americans had already put in 57,000 sorties in Iraq alone and that many different countries had bombed Daesh in Iraq, and that with the aid of some ground troops, a bit of the territory had been regained. We have no such troops in Syria.

**3.27 pm**

**Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con):** I pay tribute to the Leader of the Opposition, in his absence. All Members who have been here for some time know that he is a champion of human rights, but perhaps the greatest human right of all is the right to life. I ask the Leader of the Opposition and those who support him today to rethink their position. If we do not take on Daesh, more men, women and children—in their hundreds and thousands—will continue to be murdered.

I do not believe that anybody enters Parliament to make war. Indeed, I would hope that everyone in this Chamber is a peacemaker. There is enough war and conflict in this world already, as we are discussing today. Indeed, I pay tribute to the pacifists and peacemakers who sit on the Opposition Benches and on the Government Benches. Their views are both valid and respectable. Unfortunately, our enemies—Daesh—are neither peacemakers nor pacifists. They are a brutal, murderous and genocidal enemy that are killing men, women, children and peacemakers—probably at this very hour, as we speak.

Whether it is politically or intellectually palatable or not, it is a case, sadly, of kill or be killed. On a point of law for some of the waverers opposite, I would say that the motion before us is both legal and legitimate—both in terms of UN resolution 2249 and the right to self-defence in international law. As the Prime Minister reminded us, it is a UN resolution supported by both China and Russia—and, I may add, one supported by the Venezuelan Government, who are admired by some in the wider labour movement, such as the Unite leader Len McCluskey, and by many in Momentum. If Venezuela is prepared to support airstrikes in Syria, then why not Her Majesty’s Opposition? Let me say at this juncture that it should be the consciences of individual Members of Parliament that determine the fate of the sombre motion that is

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before us today, not the bullying and self-interested unions that appear to be engaged in their own insurgency campaign against Labour MPs.

Can there ever be a just war? Many faith leaders believe so, including faith leaders here in Britain. That is recognised by the Archbishop of Canterbury—who has said that “forceful force” should be used in the circumstances that we are discussing—as well as other Christian bishops and religious minority leaders in the middle east. There is such a thing as a just war.

**Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con):** My hon. Friend is describing the precepts of St Augustine very eloquently, but may I ask him to desist from describing this conflict as a war? Calling it a war gives the opposition a dignity that it does not deserve.

**Mark Pritchard:** My hon. and gallant Friend speaks with great experience and wisdom. I both agree and disagree with him, because I think we need to recognise this for what it is. We are at war, but it is a war that we have not chosen, or a conflict that we have not chosen. It is a conflict that our enemies have brought upon us, and we need to defend our interests and our citizens both at home and abroad.

**Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con):** I agree with a great deal of what my hon. Friend has said so far, but I think that our hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) put it very well the other day when, opening the debate on the middle east, he said that this could not be a war because ISIL was not a state. We should be clear about the fact that ISIL is the common enemy of humanity.

**Mark Pritchard:** As always, my hon. Friend speaks wisely, as did my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison). We are in conflict, or at war, or whatever phrase we wish to use. The fact is that we have a common enemy, and we must work with our allies to destroy that enemy. As I said earlier, it is, sadly, a case of kill or be killed. None of us wants to be in conflict. In an ideal world, we would all be at peace, but at present we do not live in that ideal world, certainly in this dispensation.

It could also be asked whether socialists ever fight just wars. The late, very great Jack Jones, the “union man” himself, stood up for freedom and democracy. So did Clement Attlee—Major Attlee—a wounded war hero, and Ernest Bevin, arguably Labour’s best Foreign Secretary. All of them fought for freedom and liberty in their own ways. Some were more to the left than others, I admit, but all were socialists, defending Britain, defending our allies, defending our values, defending the weak and marginalised, defending the persecuted and the repressed. I say to undecided Labour MPs, “Look to your proud socialist history”; but I also say to them, “Do not be bound by recent ‘new Labour’ history.” This is a new challenge and a new threat.

We may not all be where we want to be, but we are where we are. Today’s motion is a dose of reality for all of us. It is an internationalist motion, an inclusive motion, a protective motion, a motion that cannot be ignored, and a motion that I hope will be supported by Members in all parts of the House.

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**3.33 pm**

**Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab):** It is easy to be brief at this point, because I can honestly say that I agreed with every word of two speeches made by Labour Members. Both my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) made an extraordinary case in explaining why action was necessary, and also why inaction would be so difficult to defend.

The decision that we are being asked to make is particularly important in the light of the social media that now exist. Our email inboxes are full of messages saying, “Don’t do it.” I am relieved that I am being asked not to do it, because I would be deeply troubled if my inbox was full of gung-ho messages saying, “Go and get them.” We have come here to make an extremely careful judgment, and we can only ever make the judgment that is best at any one time.

There are many unanswered questions about the part of the world that we are discussing, and none of us can claim to know what the next steps will be. However, there are some things that we do know, and one of them is that just as actions have consequences, so does inaction. The danger for Governments is not knowing when not to act; given that it is always possible for them to act, they must always ask whether it is the right thing to do. The danger for Oppositions is in thinking that because they are in opposition, it is appropriate always to oppose. Occasionally it is right to do things, and occasionally it is right for an Opposition to support a Government, even when they do not entirely agree with a motion on the Order Paper.

I will support the motion tonight because it is good enough, and it is good enough for three reasons that are closely intertwined. We face a conflict with Daesh, because they are terrorists and bad people with, in my view, no redeeming features. We also face a potential civil war with Assad, and—this has not been mentioned so far—a very difficult conflict involving Turkey and Russia. However, the fact that the situation is complicated does not mean that we should not do anything.

Four things persuaded me that it was, on balance, better to do something than to do nothing. The starting point was the United Nations resolution, which was supremely important. Then there was the fact that our airstrikes are adding capacity, which will enhance the actions that we are already taking in Iraq. If we extend those actions to Syria, we will not only bring something to the table, but strengthen the coalition. As the motion rightly points out, we are looking at a political process. Anyone who has been involved in negotiations knows that military actions will not succeed on their own without a political process. The two go hand in hand, and each enhances the other. That political process will be vital.

There is one mistake that I hope we will not make again. We must not take our eye off the fact that we need functioning state institutions when we take military action. That was one of the errors that we made in Iraq. I hope that it will be different in Syria, because of the work that the Department for International Development is doing, and the work we are doing with the coalition to retain the state structures. We all know we cannot predict what will happen next, but we also know that,

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whatever happens next, we will be acting with our allies, because countries such as France are calling on us. If the situation had been reversed and the same thing had happened in London, and we asked France for help and it said no, we would have been appalled.

Finally, we have to answer the question: why now? Why do we not wait a few weeks? The dynamic changed when Russia entered the theatre, but most importantly, action is in the national interest, because Daesh’s ability to both operate in Syria and organise terrorist attacks on mainland Europe has increased tremendously. We must act now, because if we want to stop that war, this may not be the perfect first step, but at this stage, it is certainly the best first step that I am being asked to support.

**3.38 pm**

**Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con):** I agree entirely with the excellent speeches by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), and by the Chairman of the Defence Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis). They both made eloquent speeches, and I shall therefore focus not on the high principle but on the practicalities. I shall start with the Prime Minister’s point that all Members on both sides of the House want to see the end of ISIS. We are therefore talking about not the aim but the practical method of achieving it.

I think that all hon. Members could agree with 90% of what is in the motion. The contentious part is whether we should engage in the bombing. That is being proposed for entirely understandable but symbolic reasons. Symbolic is not a small word; they are important symbolic reasons. The proposal is to add a few British fast jets to the American-led air campaign in Syria and Iraq. We should face some facts, however. That air campaign has so far, in both countries, mounted some 10,000 sorties, one third of them in Syria, against 16,000 targets. The avowed aim? To degrade ISIS, or Daesh. The outcome? In the period in which the campaign has been operating, recruitment to Daesh has doubled from 15,000 to 30,000 personnel. By a macabre coincidence, that is about one extra recruit for every target we destroyed. So, from that point of view, we are not achieving our aim, although we are doing some good things. The former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), who is no longer in her place, talked about pinning ISIS down in Kobane, but we are not achieving what we intended to achieve. Arguably, we are achieving the opposite.

Last week, the greatest modern warrior, the American ex-special forces general Stanley McChrystal, was in the House and I spoke to him. He was talking principally about drones and aerial warfare, and he said, in terms, that we should never believe that we can cut off the head of the snake in this kind of war, because it always regenerates and reorganises. He said that that was the wrong metaphor for this kind of warfare, and that it would not work on any level.

Another point leapt out at me. I have heard arguments from many knowledgeable colleagues, but no matter how skilful and brave our pilots are—and they will be both—it is debateable whether they will make even a marginal difference. The reason is that despite the availability of a large number of aircraft and all sorts of weapons systems—including Brimstone, and others that compete

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with and might be better than Brimstone—the constraint will be the targets. The Americans are flying about seven sorties a day in Syria, while the Russians declare that they are flying more than 140. That is because the Russians are being given up to 800 targets a day by the Syrian army, while we are getting fewer than half a dozen, by the sound of it, from the Free Syrian Army. If you want a practical demonstration of the usefulness in war of the 70,000 fighters we are being told about, you have it there. They are not useful, even as target-spotters.

**Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con):** My right hon. Friend has a clear view on what we may or may not do in Syria, but what is his opinion of the bombings taking place in Iraq?

**Mr Davis:** I have already told my hon. Friend that; he cannot have been listening. The simple truth is that the bombings have not achieved their aim; they are doing some useful things, including pinning some people down, but by themselves they cannot achieve what we have been told is their aim—namely, the reduction and removal of ISIS. That is their failure.

So where do we go from here? I will not go into elaborate detail on the long-term plan. We have heard about that from a number of colleagues, and all their arguments have been very well made. We know that the diplomatic creation of the future Syrian state and the creation of an army on the ground will be difficult and not very dramatic. However, people are looking for immediate action, and there are a couple of things that we could do pretty much straightaway. First, we could demand—not request—that Turkey shuts the Turkey-Syria border. ISIS gets $1 billion of income from putting oil across that border, and it sends weapons the other way. This gives freedom of movement to ISIS. Turkey is a NATO member, and it should not be giving any sort of comfort to our enemies.

Secondly, Saudi and the Gulf states are supposedly our allies, yet they send tens of millions of dollars into these Islamist organisations—not just ISIS but al-Nusra and others. That money is used essentially to employ soldiers in a country where starvation is always at the door, so that money is incredibly powerful. If we want to do something straightaway that would achieve more than several squadrons of aircraft, we should get our allies to do their job. People have raised another issue several times today. They have asked, “Shouldn’t we help the French?” Yes, we should help our allies, and we should do it by destroying ISIS, but we should do it properly and not by symbolism.

**3.44 pm**

**Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab):** First, I want to welcome the Prime Minister’s use of the name Daesh for this barbaric group of people who have absolutely no connection at all to Islam, my faith—as has been affirmed by the Grand Imam Sheikh el-Tayeb of al-Azhar University in only the last few days. That ensures that those people are not referred to in any way as Muslims; nor should they be seen as such.

Since 9/11, we have been saying to the majority of Muslim countries that they should start to take action against radicalisation and terrorism. They have started to do that. Indonesia, Pakistan, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and other countries are involved in doing that, and

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Pakistan has, over almost three and a half years, lost 5,000 troops in tackling this. Before that, it was a common occurrence for a number of suicide bombings to take place across the country, particularly in Karachi, where there was a disproportionately large number of deaths. By taking the very difficult steps of putting boots on the ground in the North-West Frontier areas, and going street by street, door by door, Pakistan has managed, by and large, to deal with this.

We cannot tackle the terrorists, the ideology and all these people by airstrikes alone. In terms of the case put forward today, I have had the fairly strong view for a long time that we should support action against Daesh, but I am in a quandary at the moment, having heard all the people who have spoken to me, including my constituents and people I have spoken to in this place. I find myself in a very different place at the moment. That is because of some of the things that have been said by the Prime Minister. He and the Foreign Secretary have said that under no circumstances will we have any people on the ground. The only way we will defeat this horrid group is by having people on the ground. That means not just us, America, France or others from the EU; we need a coalition of the nations, including the Muslim countries in the area, to deal with this problem. We must not think we can deal with it by airstrikes, no matter how accurate our Brimstone missiles are, and no matter how many strikes and sorties we can carry out. If we are able to wage that war from the air and defeat Daesh, there is a bigger issue: consistently, on the issue of terrorism and radicalisation, we have managed to jump out of the frying pan and into the fire.

When the Syria dispute started, there was the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda. That popped on for a bit and nobody took much notice—it was considered to be fine because they were having a go at Assad, and it was thought, “That’s okay, we can stand by and allow them to do that.” Also, of course, some of our allies wanted to supply arms to them. So we turned a blind eye and allowed them to carry on, but that turned into Daesh/ISIL. Not only is there the barbarity of those people and what they wanted to do, but they were joined by the Ba’athists in Iraq, and all those people—in some instances Sunnis—who call for a geographic state in Iraq. We now discuss how we can divide Iraq up to reflect the different religious groups, but that is complete nonsense. First, what we must do is take on this rag, tag and bobtail group of people who do not represent anybody, and the only way we will do that is by moving forward.

I also want to say very quickly that we need to tackle the assertions of 70,000 people whom we call the Free Syrian Army. That is, again, al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood, and those people who are never going to be our friends.

**3.49 pm**

**Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con):** There are some occasions in life that we dread, but we know we will have to face them, even if we do not want to. Today is one of those days. Like all my colleagues, I do not relish the thought of extending the airstrikes—one innocent life lost is one too many—yet I find myself ready to vote for airstrikes in Syria. My mind is very clear: there cannot ever be a justification to allow terrorists to wreak terror and fear across this or any other nation. It just is not right.

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Earlier this year, I spoke in the House about the tragic shooting of one of my constituents, Scott Chalkley from Chaddesden, who was shot dead by terrorists while he was on holiday in Tunisia. That was followed by the tragedy in Paris, where the lives of people who were out enjoying themselves were ended. The lives of loved ones were taken, and the lives of others have been changed dramatically, both physically and emotionally. When such things happen, they bring home to us just how vulnerable we all really are. Such events take place all over the world, and I am clear that we cannot stand by and allow that to happen. Having listened to the Prime Minister on Monday and today, I am satisfied that intervention through airstrikes is absolutely necessary to protect our way of life so that we can all live reasonably as human beings.

I recently went on a trip to Jordan to visit refugee camps and host communities. I was really struck by the stories relayed about people fleeing their homes and leaving behind what many of us take for granted—such as a roof over our heads and the freedom to walk down the street—purely to ensure that their family members could stay alive. One mother told me that she fled after the death of one of her children, to safeguard the lives of her other children from ending so abruptly. It became clear that all the families I spoke to wanted to return home. We must ensure that we help to rebuild Syria, so that Syrians can return home to the country they love. I know that will take time and I feel great sadness that we need to intervene in order to ensure that everyone present, all my family, all my constituents, every person living in this country, refugees and, indeed, people all over the world can live a life free of fear.

**Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Amanda Solloway:** I have nearly finished.

I am the mother of two grown-up daughters and I want them to have children of their own who will run free and not live in fear of being struck down while at play. It is essential that we help where we can and in any way we can. All families deserve that, and it is our duty as elected Members to deliver it. With a heavy heart, I support the airstrikes, but I will vote with full confidence that it is the right thing to do.

**3.52 pm**

**Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab):** One hopes that the decision that will be made at 10 o’clock will be made according to our own conclusions, and not because of whipping or any threats from outside, whatever they may be and which I deplore. We should be able to vote without any fears of intimidation and, if I may say so, without slurs such as that apparently made by the Prime Minister at a private meeting. I am not a sympathiser with terrorism. I hate terrorism and I doubt that a single Member of this House thinks otherwise—at least I hope not.

As one Member, I am simply not persuaded by the arguments advanced by the Government today. If I were, I would certainly vote with the Government and I would certainly not be put off doing so by threats, any more than a number of my right hon. and hon. Friend will be. We must be able to vote as we consider appropriate.

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Some may doubt it, but in my view there is growing public unease over what is being proposed. No one can possibly doubt the sheer murderous brutality of the people who are described by various names, including ISIL and Daesh. We know that and we knew it long before Paris. We knew about the atrocities, beheadings, the publicising of those beheadings, and the burning alive of the Jordanian airman. There is no doubt or argument about that type of foe, but there is unease—and I happen to share it—that the proposal to join our allies in bombing parts of Syria will make us feel good, but in the end it will make little or no difference.

I have supported more military action in the past 30 years than I have opposed, but I have done so on the basis that there is an objective. With the liberation of Kuwait, for example, there was quite clearly an objective. There was a clear objective over Kosovo, which I supported. I urged that the massacre of Muslims should be halted. We knew that if the Serbian leadership did not give way ground troops would be used by this country and the United States.

The point has been well made that no military chief and no one who has held senior military office here, in the United States or in France, nor the Government, states that airstrikes alone will defeat ISIL. Everyone knows that. There is no feeling that if we approve the motion at 10 o’clock we will be on the way to victory. We know that airstrikes alone will not do what is necessary. The Government argue that we are bombing in Iraq, so why not in Syria? My fear is how long it will take before the Government advance the argument that because Parliament has agreed to airstrikes, which are not sufficient, we should introduce ground troops. Ground troops are excluded in the motion, but is there not a possibility that in time the Government will come back with that argument? Ground troops will be necessary to defeat ISIL—I assume that no one doubts that—but they should not come from this country.

Finally, Sunni Muslim opinion asks why action is being taken against ISIL and not the other lot of mass murderers who rule Syria—the Assad regime, which is responsible for the civil war and all that has occurred. With some reluctance, I will not be able to support the Government tonight. I want to see ISIL defeated, but what is being proposed will not achieve that objective. That is why I will not be able to support the motion.

**3.57 pm**

**Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con):** It is a pleasure to take part in this debate, in which strongly held views are being put forward with passion but also with respect for the other side’s point of view. I follow the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), who I have known for many years, but I rise to support the motion. I well remember back in 2003 sitting on the Opposition Benches—very much second-class seats compared with those on this side of the House—in the third row back, studying the face of the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, as he made his case for the invasion of Iraq. Of course, none of us ever votes lightly to send our forces to war. I have 42 Commando in my constituency—magnificent Royal Marines—and knew that if we voted to send them into battle not all of them would come back and not all of them would come back in one piece. That was a very weighty matter.

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I have acknowledged publicly that that decision was a mistake. There were no weapons of mass destruction and going to war on a false premise was a serious matter, perhaps the most serious thing—the worst thing—that a Government can ever do in a mature democracy, but just because it was wrong to invade Iraq in 2003, that does not mean that it is wrong today to join our allies in the bombing of Daesh in Syria. If we are to keep our citizens safe here in the United Kingdom, we have to take the fight to Daesh and to destroy them where they are as well as protecting ourselves in our own land through our excellent security forces and police.

**Ian Blackford:** Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on what he has been saying about the dodgy dossier we had on Iraq, having heard from the Chairman of the Defence Committee, in particular, that the stories of the 70,000 troops are something of a fantasy? Given that they are central to the Government’s story and strategy, will he reflect on what we have been told about those 70,000?

**Mr Streeter:** I certainly do not accept that the Syrian Free Army of 70,000 is a fantasy. There are different views, but I prefer to trust the Prime Minister’s security briefing and I certainly take a lot of comfort from that.

I recognise that bombing alone will not solve the problem and that revenge for the Paris attacks is not a sufficient motivation, but I am fully persuaded that we cannot do nothing. I realise that bombing must be part of a much wider response—a response that the Prime Minister set out last week and again today in very credible terms—and I realise that it does not lie within the gift or power of European nations alone to resolve these deep-rooted and complex regional conflicts, but just because we cannot do everything, it does not mean we should do nothing.

**James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that just because the future is uncertain and we are not going to get a neat Hollywood-style finish, it does not mean we should not take action we know will at least take us in the right direction, even if the ultimate destination is unclear?

**Mr Streeter:** I agree with my hon. Friend. It is the case I am seeking to make: we must not do nothing, and we have to do the right thing.

Some of my constituents believe that this action will make matters worse for us in the UK, but I do not accept that. We are already a top target of these evil people. It is clear that our military capability will make a strategic difference to the fight to eradicate and destroy them. That is why France, the USA and the Gulf states are keen for us to join the action. As we have heard, there is a United Nations resolution authorising all means necessary. It surely makes no sense to carry out airstrikes in Iraq but to have to stop at a border not recognised by Daesh, especially given that its headquarters are in Syria. It is from these strongholds that they plan and launch attacks against the west.

We all know that in every conflict of which we have had recent experience, the long-term resolution was found in a political settlement—in the warring factions talking to each other and agreeing on a way forward. So it was in Northern Ireland. But how can anybody possibly believe we can negotiate with the fanatics behind

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the butchery in Iraq and Syria? It is simply not possible. I realise that the presence of ground forces is vital, and I hope that forces from the region, whether the Free Syrian Army or others, will be able to seize the opportunity to advance that airstrikes will bring.

It is vital that the Vienna talks make progress—I understand that good progress is being made—and deliver a long-term settlement for Syria that encompasses a transfer of power from the Assad regime in a way that maximises the prospect of stability. In both Iraq and Syria, we need to see Governments that represent all the people and which the international community can support. Syria is not like Libya, where removing the leader created chaos. Syria has a highly educated population and a strong middle class and civil society.

As many have said, the situation is a mess, and there are no easy answers, but in the end we are being attacked by a bunch of ruthless barbarians who seek to destroy the values that we hold dear. It is just and right that we should defend ourselves and the many innocent people they kill, maim and enslave on a daily basis. We are right to do all we can to eradicate this evil force from the face of the earth. I will be supporting the motion tonight.

**4.3 pm**

**Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP):** “We cannot do nothing”, said the hon. Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter), but that is not an argument for doing anything; it is an argument for doing something that works, as part of an overall strategy that has some chance of success.

I find myself in the unusual position of complimenting some Conservative speakers. We have heard some fine speeches thus far, but some of the best have come from Conservative Members dissenting from the Government line. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) did the House a service by reminding us of the proportionality of what we are discussing. We are discussing adding perhaps an extra two Tornados and a segment of Typhoons to the bombing campaign in Syria. We make up 10% of the current flights in Iraq. As the right hon. Gentleman said, we will not make any conceivable difference to the air campaign in Syria, where there are too many planes already, chasing too many targets.

**Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)** *rose—*

**Alex Salmond:** I give way to my compatriot.

**Alberto Costa:** Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that the RAF has the capability to destroy Daesh’s supply and funding lines without causing any civilian casualties of note? If the RAF is capable of doing that, why is he opposing this?

**Alex Salmond:** I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman the number of times I have heard the argument about minimising the civilian casualties from a bombing campaign. I bow to no one on the skill of our pilots and the sophistication of weapons, but if he actually believes we are going to engage in a bombing campaign in a concentrated urban area such as Raqqa without there being civilian casualties, he is living on a different planet. As the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden said, there is no conceivable balance of difference that we are going to make to the campaign in Syria.

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The Prime Minister said that we must not be haunted or hamstrung by past mistakes, by which he meant the war in Iraq. I am more interested in far more recent mistakes in terms of this House and its decision making and this Government and their decision making. First, we had last night’s mistake of describing opponents of the Government’s action as “terrorist sympathisers”. A hugely demeaning thing for a Prime Minister to do when he should be engaged in attempting to unite the country is to concentrate on accentuating divisions within the Labour party. Goodness knows, I have spent a lifetime in politics attacking the Labour party and replacing it, but I have not attacked its divisions on this issue because this is a matter of war and peace—it is about sending people into conflict. For a Prime Minister to demean himself in that way indicates that although he might be successful in dividing the Labour party, he will fail in uniting the country, and he should have apologised when given ample opportunity to do so.

The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chair of the Defence Committee, reminded us in his speech that only two years ago the same Prime Minister came to this House asking to bomb the other side in the Syrian civil war. That can be called many things by right hon. and hon. Members but it is not the sign of a coherent military or political strategy. Another mistake, which is less thought of, was spending 13 times as much on bombing Libya as we did on reconstructing that country after the carnage, and the total disarray and dysfunction of society that resulted.

**Mr Burrowes:** Let us bring this on to more recent history. On 26 September 2014, the SNP’s parliamentary leader, the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) voted against the bombing of ISIL in Iraq. Would the right hon. Gentleman have joined in that position? Does he maintain the opposition to operations in Iraq against ISIL?

**Alex Salmond:** The SNP has been demonstrated to be correct, not least in Iraq, in being cautious about military interventions. The difficulty is that once we get in, it is hugely difficult to get out. What I will concede to the hon. Gentleman now is that there is in one part of Iraq a logical reason for having an assisted bombing campaign, whether by the US or by the 10% contribution of the UK; the peshmerga forces on the ground, probably our only reliable ally across the region, have had some success in pushing back Daesh. The Prime Minister referred to that earlier, but he did not develop the argument in response to my question about why we do not accent our action in Iraq as opposed to diverting to Syria. What he did not address was the second part of the question I asked at closed security briefings: why have we not given the peshmerga heavy armour and heavy weapons, and why do they have to dominate the road between Mosul and Raqqa using only machine guns? I suspect that the answer—I was not given the true answer—is because it would offend our NATO allies in Turkey, who spend as much time, if not more, bombing our allies in the Kurds than they do in pursuing the campaign against Daesh.

The hon. Member for South West Devon wanted something to be done, so we must consider what can be done. First, if we as a western liberal democracy cannot

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pursue a successful campaign of propaganda against a death cult, we should have a very good look at ourselves. I accept that, at last, we have made progress in calling these people for what they are. Daesh is a mocking term that mocks their claims to be a state and to represent the great religion of Islam. Much, much more can be done in carrying that forward. Infinitely more can be done by interrupting and dislocating the internet strategy that they pursue. For one of our fast smart bombs, we could have a whole squadron of people taking down their websites and stopping the communication and the contamination of the minds of young people across western Europe, and across the rest of the world.

I very much agree with the leader of the Labour party that, above all, we need to interrupt the financial resources of Daesh without which this evil cult could not function. Whenever I ask the Prime Minister about that, he tells me that he is sitting on a Committee. For two years, we have heard nothing. Little or nothing has been done to interrupt the flow of funds and to identify and stop the financial institutions without which Daesh could not have lifted a finger against us or anyone else.

Finally, we are being asked to intervene in a bloody civil war of huge complexity without an exit strategy and no reasonable means of saying that we are going to make a difference. We should not give the Prime Minister that permission.

**4.10 pm**

**Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con):** May I start by drawing the attention of the House to my interest as a current member of the reserve forces?

The shadow of Iraq is clearly hanging heavy over this debate. In particular, it is hanging over the Labour party, and I understand that. I understand it because I have rebelled against my party only once—I am very pleased to see that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in his place, because it gives me the opportunity to point out that fact. It was in 2003 and it was over Iraq. The debate around Iraq has overshadowed our politics in this place for 12 years, and I sense that the pain is particularly felt on the Opposition Benches.

What we are considering today has very little to do with what we were considering 12 years ago. Let us cast our minds back to 2003 when we were presented with the proposition of supporting, or otherwise, what the Prime Minister of the day had committed us to. This is different because this vote is permissive; it is different because this is not actually a war at all. That was; it was entering a conflict with all our armed forces against a sovereign state with a Government, however unsavoury it was—and boy was it unsavoury. This is quite different. This is the extension of a conflict that we are already joined in and, I would argue but others may disagree, a conflict in which we are making a real contribution.

The border between Syria and Iraq is not respected by our opponent. That opponent is not subject to any form of reasonable negotiation. It is a death cult. It is an organisation that gives us a grisly form of Hobson’s choice. A person can convert and subscribe to a murderous, barbaric and medieval ideology that crucifies people, cuts off their heads and subjugates women, or they can be killed. That is the choice; there is no middle way. There are no grounds for negotiation and very, very little room for politics. I do not want to convert and I do not want to be killed and neither do my

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constituents, so the only way to deal with this organisation is by the use of lethal force within the comprehensive arrangements that we have discussed at length today.

Lethal force means the involvement of our armed forces, and our armed forces are uniquely good at that kind of thing, as many of us who have been to a number of the theatres in which they have been effective recently have seen. They are better, much better, than those of our allies, however good those allies are.

Security Council resolution 2249 is quite clear. We are to use all necessary means, and words mean what words say. Sometimes, some on the Opposition Benches seem to have been reading too much Lewis Carroll given their interpretation of what words mean. Words mean what they say. The resolution gives a green light, in clear and unambiguous terms, for this country to do what is necessary. France has made a direct request. Those of us who stood in the Chamber only a few weeks ago and emoted about what was happening in Paris need to think about that very clearly. People who were happy to sing La Marseillaise and expressed solidarity, but are not prepared to support a direct request from our second closest European neighbour, need to think about that hubris, because that is what it is.

May I make a plea on the Vienna process? In Iraq, one of the biggest mistakes was de-Ba’athification, in which everyone, from a corporal or a clerk upwards, was generally stripped out at the behest of ex-pats with an axe to grind. That made our job on reconstruction extraordinarily difficult. We must not make the same mistake.

I should like to conclude with the words of the motion, which I wholeheartedly support, and to express support and admiration for our brilliant armed forces, who are truly the best in the world. Many of them are my constituents, and need the “wholehearted support” of the whole House this evening, and I am confident that we will give it to them.

**4.16 pm**

**Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab):** It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison).

These are always the most difficult judgments—there is never a perfect solution. I have reflected with the utmost care on the case for extending our airstrikes to target Daesh’s stronghold in Syria, conscious of what I heard at the National Security Council, and mindful of what is best for my constituents and our country. I support the motion, but before I set out why, let me say something about the way in which the debate has been conducted outside the Chamber. Let us be clear: there is principle in opposing military action, as there is principle in supporting it. Everyone must have freedom, either in the House or outside, to say what they believe to be right without fear of recrimination.

The question before us is not whether our country enters into a new conflict—it is whether we extend our existing commitment in a conflict that we cannot hide from. We are already engaged in a struggle with Daesh. Just over a year ago, the House voted overwhelmingly to support airstrikes against Daesh in Iraq. We did so because of the direct threat that it posed to our safety and to global security. Any idea that these fanatical terrorists will leave us alone if we leave them alone is simply misguided. The action that is taking place in Iraq is working.

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There is no logic in opposing Daesh only in that country, as it does not recognise any border between its bases in Iraq and its stronghold in Syria. We must confront it over the same territory from which it is plotting attacks against us. The dangers projected from Daesh’s stronghold in Syria have multiplied, and we will not overcome it with piecemeal interventions. That is why I have made it clear that I would only support the extension of military action against Daesh if it was framed in a wider strategy that leveraged all the tools at our disposal.

There is agreement across the House that diplomacy to broker an end to the Syrian civil war must play an essential role. In an ideal world, we would perhaps wait for the transition timetable agreed at the Vienna conference to be concluded, but I do not believe the scale of the threat that we face affords us that luxury. I understand the voices cautioning against our broader engagement, but the test for all of us must be hastening the defeat of Daesh. There is no realistic strategy for bringing about Daesh’s defeat without degrading its command and control structures in Raqqa.

When will we begin that task, if not now? We have a firm legal basis in the UN resolution, and our allies have asked for our help and the capabilities that our brave Royal Air Force pilots can offer in precision targeting. In the words of the French socialist Defence Minister,

“The use of these capabilities over Syria would put additional and extreme pressure on the ISIS terror network.”

If we ignore those calls today, when will we answer them in the future?

I understand hon. Members who have listened to the case for extending airstrikes but who are reluctant to proceed without greater assurances from the Prime Minister about the strategy he is pursuing. In this sense I agree with them. The proposals before us are constructive and, in my view, meet the basic test for extending our action, but they need to be developed if we are ultimately to succeed in overcoming Daesh and restoring peace for the Syrian people. Let me say this to the Government Front Bench: on post-conflict reconstruction, the guarantee of a further £1 billion in humanitarian relief is significant, but we need to hold the international community to its responsibilities to Syria and refugees at the upcoming donors conference in London.

In conclusion, my party, the Labour party, has a long and proud tradition of standing up for the national interest when our country is under threat. When the War Cabinet met in 1940, it was the Labour Ministers Clement Attlee and Arthur Greenwood who tipped the balance in favour of resisting Nazism. Daesh are the fascists of our time. I believe there is still a dignity in uniting with our allies in common cause against a common enemy in defence of our common humanity. That is what I hope we will do.

##### 4.21 pm

**Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con):** There is an important religious dimension to this debate and faith leaders shape public opinion, so I thought it might be helpful if I shared with the House the views expressed by the Church of England on the subject.

At a meeting of the General Synod last week, a motion on the migrant crisis called unanimously upon the Government

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“to work with international partners in Europe and elsewhere to help establish safe and legal routes to places of safety, including this country, for refugees who are vulnerable and at severe risk.”

That motion passed with 333 votes and none opposing. The Archbishop of Canterbury made it clear that, in his view, force might be necessary to keep the refugees safe. He also said that the Church would not be forgiven if it turned inwards at this time of crisis. Rather, it must face the fact that extremism is now a feature of every major faith, including Christianity.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols has backed proportionate military intervention to tackle Daesh, and he cites Pope Francis saying that where aggression is unjust, aggression is licit against the aggressor. These are views which I share, which is why I will support the motion.

As the Prime Minister has said, this is not a war against Islam. Religious extremism is global and the key to solving this is the determination of people of faith to overcome it, not just in Syria, but right around the world. The Church is well placed to help, as the conflict is both theological and ideological. By reaching out to other people of faith and showing common cause in tackling extremism, we can demonstrate to a fearful secular world that faith leaders hold one of the keys to finding a solution. Where religion is being hijacked for political ends, we should say so.

The Anglican Communion offers a worldwide network of churches to deploy in the joint global endeavour to stamp out extremism. Together, the integration of hard and soft power is likely to produce a better outcome. I urge my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who will be replying to the debate, to consider this question: to combat Daesh, it is important that prominent theological and ideological strategy is alongside any potential military humanitarian intervention. Unless we understand our enemy and those we choose as our allies in the region, we are unlikely to properly understand the conflict. I hope he will be able to inform the House what thought the Government have given to this advice as they develop their strategy.

The Church can also play an important practical role in offering hospitality, accommodation, support and friendship to refugees, whatever their religious tradition, and advocacy for those who are being persecuted because of their faith. Hospitality is seen as a spiritual gift by the Church and explains why this country, with its Judeo-Christian roots, has a long tradition of providing safe haven to successive waves of migrants. We need to recognise that the conflict may affect the number of migrants and displaced people, and the Prime Minister is therefore right to convene a donors conference early in 2016.

We should also recognise that international development aid agencies, many of which are Christian in origin, would emphasise that it is better to help refugees in their own region, so that once it is safe they can more easily return and rebuild their country. My local imam, who is from Syria and has family still there, is very anxious about the safety of civilians and the need to avoid a power vacuum.

The public will need continuous assurance and transparency about why action is being taken and what outcomes are being achieved, so I welcome the commitment to quarterly updates for the House.

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It is all important how we give our international aid, during and post-conflict, and how we ensure that the voice of the displaced is heard in the post-conflict planning. As we know, it is the most vulnerable, and often the women, who have no voice at all in war. We have a duty to ensure that they are heard.

##### 4.25 pm

**Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab):** There are two issues at the heart of this debate: the first is how we view the terrorist threat we face, and the second is the specific proposal before us tonight. I will take each in turn. There is a view that the Islamist terrorist threat we face is a product of what we have done or a reaction to it. According to this view, although the activities of terrorists are of course condemned, the real source of the problem is seen as the actions we have taken in the past, and the kind of action proposed in the motion. This was the view that saw the killings in Paris as “reaping the whirlwind” of the action that France, or perhaps the west more generally, has taken.

The danger of this view is that it infantilises terrorism and absolves it of full responsibility for its actions. That view, at heart, separates the world into adults and children, or perpetrators and victims, with the west as perpetrator and others as victims. But life is not that simple. The world is not, in foreign policy terms, split up into adults and children. The terrorists are adults, motivated by their own ideology, which justifies the killing of innocent people from France to Mali, Iraq and Syria. They are fully, not partially, responsible for what they do. No one forces anyone to sell women into sexual slavery. No one forces anyone to behead innocent aid workers. No one forces anyone to bomb the London underground or kill innocent Parisians at a pop concert.

The problem with this argument is that it not only misunderstands what we are up against, but implies that if we lie low they will leave us alone. They will not. If we disarm ourselves against the threat we face, we cannot confront or overcome it. This argument is also too timid in defending our own values. Our society is not perfect, but we strive for a society in which women and men are equal, and where we have freedom of association, freedom of religion, democracy and diversity, and those things are worth defending.

Let me turn to the specific proposition before us tonight. Too much of the debate in recent days has discussed it as though it is an entirely new military intervention, but it is not; it is an extension of the military intervention against ISIS in Iraq that we have been engaged in for 15 months, which has had some effect. Why is it right to take action against ISIS in Iraq but not in Syria?

Several things have happened since we took that decision. First, we have had more terrorism, on the beaches in Tunisia, in Paris, in Mali, on a Russian passenger jet and elsewhere. Secondly, we have had a United Nations resolution calling on us to take all necessary measures to eradicate the safe haven that ISIS/Daesh has across both Iraq and Syria. That call from the international community, backed up by calls from a socialist Government in France, from Jordan and from other allies, should mean something to us.

As I said to the Prime Minister the other day, if we take this action we extend not only our involvement, but our responsibility. If we do this, he has a personal

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responsibility, and the Government as a whole have a responsibility, not just to take military action as a response to Paris and then move on; it is a big moral responsibility to use every means that we have, diplomatically with our soft power, and politically through the Vienna process, to get people around the table, including many who see one another as enemies or opponents, to try to carve out a better future for Syria. The use of hard power and soft power go hand in hand.

Similarly, if we are concerned about the flight of refugees, and the human desperation implied in that flight, then we have a duty to do something about its causes. That means both tackling Daesh/ISIS and trying to shape a better future for Syria—a future where people can live in that country rather than seeing it as place from which to flee.

##### 4.30 pm

**Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con):** We have heard a lot about the complexities around this very difficult question, so I stand with humility not to add any particularly clever intellectual insight into the debate, but to lay out very briefly my view—and I hope, by extension, the views of most of those whom we ask to conduct these operations—of what this means for our country and the choice we face tonight.

I feel very strongly about national security. I have seen the threats that we face with my own eyes and I have felt them with my own hands. We have a privileged way of life in this country, with a free democracy, a free-speech society, and a healthy economy. We are privileged for reasons too numerous to enter into now, but chiefly blessed because throughout our generations we have had men and women who believe so much in this nation that they have taken difficult political decisions, and some have even taken up arms and sacrificed everything, to protect this way of life. I have become worried of late that we have lost some of that spirit—something that makes us recognise the dangerous threat to this precious way of life and resolve to deal with it appropriately. We must always remember how privileged we are in the sea of humanity of which we are a part. We earned this privilege through the years, from generation to generation. We protected this gift, and it is time to protect it again.

We are under threat from a group of individuals who seek to destroy our very way of life in this country. They hate everything about us and work night and day to disrupt and kill us whenever the opportunity presents itself. This is not the Iraq problem of 2003.

**Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that at the heart of this matter is that only last month one of our closest allies suffered the most horrific terrorist attack, that that same ally is asking us for military help, and that therefore quite the wrong message for us to send out would be simply to turn our back on one of our closest allies at this time?

**Johnny Mercer:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I completely agree. This is a hugely complex issue and there are no easy answers, but I do think we are in danger of almost over-complicating what it is—a threat to our national security, the capability of individuals to project force into this country, and the duty we have to defend it. These individuals have demonstrated that

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they have strategic reach. They can reach into our homelands, into our communities and into our families, and destroy all that we hold dear.

I understand the avalanche of questions from colleagues, and I think that in the history of this House it would be impossible to find a Prime Minister who has done more to answer them. We will add to the mission in that part of the world militarily. We will operate in a way that will—not might, but will—accelerate—

**Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP):** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Johnny Mercer:** In a moment.

We will add to that mission because we operate in a way that will—not might, but will—accelerate the process of destroying the networks and individuals who operate against us. We have been doing that in Iraq; we must also do it in Syria, where they regenerate themselves. We will use weapons—I have used them myself—that are specifically designed to limit collateral damage while retaining pinpoint accuracy and lethality. They are better at this than anything else currently being used. We have been asked by our international partners to step up, and we must deliver on that.

Overlaying these technical arguments must surely be a greater calling that, in the relative comfort of the United Kingdom in 2015, we cannot neglect. We have a duty in this House to keep our nation safe. That involves a multi-faceted approach. We must do all we can to stabilise the instability through aid. We must ensure that our security and intelligence services have the resources and powers to act here at home to retain an effective goal line defence. We must train and mentor indigenous forces. We must do everything possible to stop the source of funds for terrorist organisations, however uncomfortable the conversations with those in the region may be. I have personally interrogated the Government’s response to the threat, and I am satisfied that we are doing all of those things.

In our comfortable existence in this country of ours, we must also accept some uncomfortable truths. There are some—thankfully few, but a significant few—in this world who trade on man’s inhumanity to man. They use fear of religion and violence to promote nothing more and nothing less than their own self-interest and power. The so-called religion they proclaim is as far removed from Islam, a religion of peace, and from any Muslims I have ever known and lived among as it is possible to get.

In 2008, I wrote a reconciliation strategy towards tier 1 al-Qaeda targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The truth then is as valid as it is today: this group of people will never be reconciled to the peaceful, democratic, equal society that they hate so much. They want to die. They want to kill all those who do not conform. Until they are killed they will not deviate from their path. Military action is therefore part of national security. As a society, we must get used to that in the barbaric world in which we now live. We cannot honestly say that we are doing all we can to our constituents at home if our full-spectrum response does not include military action.

Finally, I respect and to an extent understand those who disagree with me. We have made catastrophic mistakes of late, which have damaged our standing on the world stage, but they are done. They are history, and they

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cannot be changed. We must wear them and carry them as our burden. That is the least we owe to the families of the men and women we have lost in pursuit of such actions. Similarly, I understand those who think that some of us are too quick to call for action and seem to take every opportunity to engage militarily abroad. All I would say to them is that conducting such operations makes you less, not more, likely to want to do so again or to ask anybody else to do it for you unless it was absolutely necessary.

Today, I say to the House that this action is absolutely necessary: we must do all we can to keep our people safe. A part of that involves surgical foreign military engagement, and if we neglect that part, we cannot honestly say we are doing everything we can to keep our families safe. I am not prepared to go back to Plymouth tomorrow night and say to my constituents that I was fully aware of the threat that we face from this particular angle, but was not prepared to do everything possible to protect them from this threat.

##### 4.37 pm

**Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green):** I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). Although I do not agree with the position he put forward, I think he put it very clearly and passionately, for which I thank him. I thank the armed forces for the work they do.

I share the horror and revulsion at recent atrocities in Paris, Beirut, Syria itself and elsewhere. yet I have still to hear convincing evidence to suggest that UK bombing of ISIS targets in Syria is likely to increase our security in Britain or help to bring about a lasting peace in the region. On the contrary, the evidence appears to suggest that it would make matters worse. I want to highlight that in the few minutes available.

If we are interested in evidence, a good place to start might be to examine the effect of the US-led bombing campaign so far, explore whether it has been successful and see whether our contribution would make a real difference. From what I have seen, the sustained bombings to date have not done much to push Daesh into retreat. According to the latest figures from the US Department of Defence, US-led forces have flown some 57,000 sorties, while completing 8,300 airstrikes over a 17-month period, but they have relatively little to show for it. While the air war has so far killed an estimated 20,000 ISIS supporters, the number of fighters ISIS can still deploy—between 20,000 and 30,000—remains unchanged.

Moreover, there are very real dangers that airstrikes on Syria have become increasingly western-driven. All four of the middle eastern states previously involved—Jordan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—have now withdrawn. That risks feeding the Daesh propaganda, in which it presents itself as the true guardian of Islam under attack from the crusader west. Although utterly pernicious and wrong, precisely that message is being reinforced by western bombings, with every indication that the attacks are an incredibly effective recruiting sergeant. According to US intelligence sources, last September, 15,000 recruits were reported to have joined Daesh from 80 countries; a year later, the figure

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has risen to 30,000 recruits from 100 countries. I have had no reassurance that western military action would not simply drive more recruitment.

I have not heard any evidence to contradict the conclusion of the Foreign Affairs Committee’s report about the military challenges. The report very clearly stated that its witnesses did not consider that extending air strikes into Syria

“would have anything other than a marginal effect.”

Indeed, as other Members have pointed out, far from the issue being a lack of allied aircraft above Syria, the real problem is actually a shortage of viable targets on the ground. The dangers are compounded by ISIS’s deeply cruel use of human shields, which makes targeting more difficult and will add to the civilian death toll.

There is much talk of focusing on Raqqa, but according to recent exiles, many in the ISIS leadership have gone to ground in places such as Mosul. They suggest that to get rid of ISIS in a city like Mosul, which has 1.5 million people and perhaps 150,000 ISIS terrorists, we would literally have to flatten the entire city.

Those of us who are sceptical about the use of air strikes are often accused of saying that we do not want anything to happen and that we want inaction. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Government can and should be playing a role in brokering peace and stability in the region. The Prime Minister could be redoubling his commendable efforts to find a diplomatic solution. The civil war is inextricably linked to the rise of ISIS in Syria, as the Foreign Affairs Committee report emphasised repeatedly. ISIS flourishes where chaos reigns, so renewed efforts are needed to end the Syrian civil war.

**Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind):** Is the hon. Lady inviting the House to ignore completely UN Security Council resolution 2249?

**Caroline Lucas:** That resolution calls on us to use “all means”. I want to make sure that we are using all of the means short of military action. *[Interruption.]* I do not believe that we are doing that and I do not believe that we should use military action unless there is evidence that it would make things better. There is laughter on the Government Benches at the idea that we might not want to take military action if there is no evidence that it will work.

One reason I do not want to use military action is that there are no ground forces. We have heard again and again that air strikes will not work without ground forces, yet when we ask where the ground forces will come from, it turns out that they are mythical—they are “bogus battalions”, as the Chair of the Defence Committee said.

Let us not suggest that those of us who do not think that there is an instant military answer are not just as committed to seeing an end to ISIS as those on the other side of the House who seem to think that there is a military answer. All of us are committed to getting rid of ISIS. Some of us are more committed than others to looking at the full range of measures in front of us and to looking at the evidence that suggests that bombing, to date, has not been successful.

I was talking about the other measures that I would like to see taken forward. I talked about the diplomatic efforts, building on the Vienna peace talks. The diplomatic effort must extend to Iraq, where the Abadi Government

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must be encouraged to reach out to the neglected Sunni minority, especially in those parts of the country where ISIS is recruiting.

Why are we not applying sanctions to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states that have turned a blind eye and allowed the flow of finance to ISIS and, potentially, other terrorist groups? Why are we still selling weapons to Saudi Arabia, when they are then used in a vicious and destabilising war in Yemen that has killed thousands and made millions homeless, and that is creating yet more chaos in which al-Qaeda can thrive? Why are we not putting pressure on Turkey over the oil sales and the transit of fighters across its border?

Why are we not doing more on refugees? We should have more refugees here in the UK—of course we should—but we should also put more pressure on our allies to put more resources into the refugee camps in the region. I appreciate that the Prime Minister has done a lot on that. This country has been good on that issue. Let us make sure that our allies do the same, because those refugee camps are becoming absolutely desperate. It is cold, there is more poverty and desperation, and we can be sure that ISIS will be recruiting in those refugee camps too.

##### 4.43 pm

**Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con):** I am bound to confess that I agreed with very little of what the Leader of the Opposition said in his contribution to this debate, but he was entirely right that whether to send British armed forces into action is possibly the most serious, solemn and morally challenging decision that Members of this House can be asked to make.

The principal questions that Members should consider are those of security, legality and utility. The first question we should ask ourselves is whether the security of this country is under threat. That is certainly the case. The terrorist organisation that dignifies itself by the title Islamic State, but which I am glad to see Members on both sides are now calling Daesh, represents, in the words of Security Council resolution 2249, an

“unprecedented threat to international peace and security”.

That is certainly proving to be the case in this country.

Daesh murderers have already beheaded our fellow citizens in front of TV cameras, and distributed those medieval scenes across the internet. Thirty of our fellow citizens were murdered on the beach at Sousse, and we have heard of seven plots disrupted by the security services. There can be no doubt as to the threat that Daesh poses.

Many hon. Members will be concerned about issues of legality, but I believe that is properly addressed by resolution 2249, which calls on states to take “all necessary measures” to prevent terrorist attacks, and to eradicate the safe haven that Daesh has created in Iraq and Syria. After the experience of Iraq, it is hardly surprising that Members across the House are concerned about legality, but I do not believe that that issue arises in the current case. The international community clearly regards Daesh as such a unique threat to the peace of the world, that military action is not only justified, but positively encouraged.

On utility and whether British military action will make a difference, I believe that it will. Britain should not stand by while our strongest ally, the United States,

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and France, which has recently suffered so grievously, bear the greatest load to rid the world of this pernicious and evil organisation. As the Prime Minister rightly put it, we should not subcontract our security to our international partners. The Royal Air Force boasts some of the finest military pilots in the world. It possesses formidable weaponry, including the Brimstone missile, which is unique to the British armed forces and will make a considerable contribution to degrading the power of Daesh. Our allies are calling for us to join them.

**Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** The right hon. Gentleman says that the Brimstone missile is unique to the Royal Air Force. Is it the case—I asked the Prime Minister this the other day—that the Saudi Arabian air force has been using the Brimstone missile in Syria since February this year?

**Mr Jones:** As far as I know—I stand to be corrected by the hon. Gentleman, although I do not know whether he is right—the Brimstone missile is unique to British military forces, and we have the finest pilots in the world flying those planes.

To those who say that British engagement in Syria will put this country at risk of retribution by terrorists, I say yes, that is probably right. However, that will not change the state of affairs that currently prevails. ISIL/Daesh does not recognise the border between Iraq and Syria, and it regards land on both sides of that border as part of its territory. We are already taking action against Daesh in Iraq, and therefore we are already at risk of retribution. The danger to our citizens is already great, but I do not believe that it will be increased one jot by the action that I hope this House will support. The risk is already there, and we should continue to adopt the vigilance that we are already displaying to keep our citizens safe at home.

I believe that the case for action is strong as is the legal basis for it, and Britain can, and will, make a difference in the struggle against Daesh in Syria. I shall therefore support the motion, and I urge other hon. Members to do likewise. It is entirely honourable for Members to go through either Lobby this evening, but if the outcome of that vote means that we commit ourselves to military action in Syria, every Member of the House should—and I believe will—give all necessary support to our brave armed personnel in Syria.

##### 4.48 pm

**Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab):** The horrendous events in Paris sent shockwaves through the world, as innocent people were butchered in one of the world’s most beautiful cities. Such carnage inevitably demands a response from France’s Government and closest allies, and it is perfectly understandable that the Prime Minister decided to seek support from this House to extend UK airstrikes against Daesh from Iraq to Syria. As my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) said, however, the problem with the Prime Minister’s response is that it has exposed the failure of the Government and the international community to adopt a credible strategy.

Let me be clear: Daesh must be defeated. It represents a direct threat to our national security, and its fascist ideology and barbarism leave no space for negotiation or diplomacy. However, this will not be possible without significant ground forces from the region. In turn, this will

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not happen unless and until a political agreement is reached to end the Syrian civil war, accompanied by reconstruction and a steady flow of humanitarian support. As other hon. Members have said, there must be a concerted effort to choke off the funding and weapons that are being made available to Daesh through a variety of sources.

In truth, extending our airstrikes will do little or nothing to increase the overall capacity to degrade Daesh. It is a short-term tactic that falls into the category of being seen to do something, rather than being prepared to do the heavy lifting necessary to produce a credible and coherent strategy. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), in his excellent speech, was right to say the Government have a duty to do that heavy lifting. I am not sure that that will exists.

It is rewriting history to equate being on the left with always opposing military action. I feel this more than most, as my grandfather fought in Spain for the International Brigade against Franco’s fascists. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), I am proud of the difficult choices that we made in Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. We saved hundreds of thousands of lives and, in the latter case, undoubtedly enhanced our national security. However, my generation of politicians must also show some humility. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the post-conflict strategy was a disaster. In Afghanistan, it took far too long for us to adopt an integrated approach to security, political dialogue and development. In Libya, we had no strategy for dealing with the knock-on effects following the fall of the Gaddafi regime.

For some, the lessons of these conflicts is that military intervention is always wrong. I fundamentally disagree. Of course, military action must always be a last resort, but there are times when it is the right thing to do. However, a common denominator in recent years has been our failure, and the failure of our allies, to have a credible, sustainable strategy beyond our initial interventions, one that defeats tyranny but minimises the loss of innocent lives, and restores stability and belief in a better future. I am afraid that in the absence of such a strategy I am not prepared to risk making this mistake again. That is why tonight I will be voting against the Government’s motion.

##### 4. 52 pm

**Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con):** I have a great deal of sympathy for the way in which the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) advanced his argument, although I disagree with the conclusion at which he arrived. As he and many in the debate have said, there can be no certainty that the motion we are being asked to vote for will necessarily lead to the result the Government are seeking to achieve. Of course we cannot say that. There are a great many very difficult questions to be asked and they need to be answered.

I am very glad the Defence Committee will address shortly some of the practical questions about how military force will be used. Will our modest eight Tornadoes, even with their magnificent Brimstone missiles, make much difference? We do not know. Who will carry out

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the ground operations necessary to secure the ultimate destruction of Daesh? There is also the central question: how can we prevent the deaths of innocent civilians? What effect will it all have on security here at home? Will it make it better or worse? There are then the geopolitical questions we have not really addressed very much this afternoon. By fighting in Syria against Daesh, will we be on the same side as President Putin or even Mr Assad? Is our enemy’s enemy our friend? No one has really addressed that question.

Anyone who claims to have straightforward, clear answers to these questions is probably fooling himself. I do not believe that there are straightforward, clear answers. I do not believe that the motion can be supported simply on dogmatic or straightforward grounds. No one can be certain that what we are asking our armed forces to do will necessarily have the right outcome.

By the same token, if we cannot say with any certainty that the motion will achieve the result we seek, nor can we say that doing nothing will have a better outcome. We cannot say that at all. Who, after all, can really ignore Paris? Can we ignore Tunisia and Sharm el-Sheikh? Can we turn a blind eye to women sold into slavery, crucifixions, beheadings and gay people being thrown off buildings? Are we really too timid to react with force to mass rape, genocide and thousands of people being murdered? How will we look our constituents in the eye if doing nothing means an outrage of some kind in the UK? Can we really sit back and let the US, France, Russia and Hezbollah do our job for us?

Doing nothing is a safe option—there is no question about that at all—but action demands much tougher arguments. The fact is that the middle east is a cauldron, a viper’s nest, a maelstrom, and there can be no dogmatic certainty as to what is the best thing to do there. That leads me to three conclusions. First, our vote today cannot be based on certainty or on dogma, and it certainly cannot be based on party allegiance or on some claimed superior knowledge over other hon. Members. It is truly a conscience vote—a vote based on our instincts, on the balance of probabilities, on our feeling for things, on what our constituents said to us and, above all, our hopes for peace in the future.

Secondly, I have a real feeling that the importance of today’s vote is being somewhat over-egged. We are not “going to war with Syria”; we are not going to blast Syria to pieces, as some of my constituents have written to me to suggest. All we are doing is extending the existing campaign. We are going across an invisible line in the desert sand––the Sykes-Picot line invented by the French at some stage in the past, a line that means nothing at all. If we are committed to destroying Daesh, we must do so whether it is in Syria or Iraq.

I have been reasonably consensual up to this moment, but I am now going to jump to an area in which I am confident that I will be the only Member who agrees with me. Given the complexity of the matter and its insignificance in a sort of way, is it really right that all this debate and argument is committed to the outcome we seek this evening? The only war in the history of Great Britain on which we voted was Mr Blair’s illegal war in 2003. I do not think that that vote by the House of Commons provides a very good precedent.

There is a moral argument for saying that the generals, the intelligence chiefs and the Prime Minister should be the people who take these difficult decisions, giving us

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the opportunity to scrutinise and criticise what they have done. In asking to vote on the motion, we are in fact removing the right to disagree with our leaders subsequently. Surely there is an argument in favour of setting up some kind of structure—perhaps like the War Powers Act in the United States—and returning the royal prerogative. We need some structure by which the Prime Minister and the generals can take these decisions and it is then our right thereafter to criticise them, rather than emasculating ourselves by voting for them.

##### 4.57 pm

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** In essence, this debate boils down to UK RAF jets going into Syria, into a war that is already in existence—a multi-cornered and multifaceted war. It is not the great squadrons imagined in the press, or in the minds of the public as a result of what has been put into their minds by the press. It is, as we have heard, eight jets, and as the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee told me, probably only two would be active at any one time on any day in Syria.

For context—I am grateful to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for this—there have been 57,000 sorties in Syria, in 8,000 of which bombs have been dropped, in 17 months. That is 113 sorties a day, with 16 of them dropping bombs. We will deflect from what we are doing in Iraq, where 10% of sorties are by the UK. I asked the Prime Minister last week whether bombing Syria would mean bombing ISIL less in Iraq. He has made the choice to bomb ISIL in Iraq. He could not answer my question, though he should have been able to. He then claimed that he would have 75,000 Free Syrian Army troops. I have to tell the House that the Americans tried to raise a force of moderates and mobilise them, but it failed. David Wearing, who lectures on middle east politics in the University of London, explained on CNN:

“A US initiative to stand up even a 15,000 strong ‘moderate’ force to confront ISIS recently collapsed in failure, having put less than a half a dozen troops onto the battlefield.”

**Mr Grieve:** The one issue that does not seem to feature in the hon. Gentleman’s discourse, or that of any members of his party, is what would have happened if there had been no intervention in Iraq at all. Surely the consequences might well have been that Daesh spread very quickly and caused a generalised conflict. Ignoring that point seems remarkably selective on the part of those who argue that we should not take further steps now. I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman cared to address that point.

**Mr MacNeil:** The right hon. and learned Gentleman might like to know something about the interventions in Iraq. Martin Chulov, an Australian who works for *The Guardian*, and who just got an award from the Foreign Press Association, noted, after speaking to ISIS commanders, that they were incubated in the American camps in Iraq. That is what intervention has done. The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows full well that that is the result of intervention.

Only two months ago, one of the central views of the United States and its allied was that Russian involvement in Syria would only fuel more radicalism and extremism. Mehdi Hasan in *The Guardian* noted that the United

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States Defence Secretary, Ashton Carter, had warned of the “consequences for Russia itself”, which would become “rightly fearful” of terrorism. A point that is almost central to the public debate and discourse here in the United Kingdom in general, and in the House in particular, is that involvement in disastrous wars increases rather than decreases the threats to us in the west. I am also grateful to Mehdi Hasan for reporting the words of retired US general Mike Flynn, who used to run the US Defence Intelligence Agency, and who said

“the more bombs we drop, that just…fuels the conflict”.

That is a very hard truth for some to hear, but it is indeed the truth.

The “war on terror” started by George W. Bush was straight from the “must do something” school of thought, a school of thought that is all too prevalent in the House today. It turned a few hundred terrorists in the Hindu Kush into a force of 100,000, almost globally—they were certainly active in 20 countries—and employed the classic recruiting tactics of the unjust war in Iraq, based on lies. Twelve years ago, the “must do something” rhetoric in the UK involved talk of “appeasement” and attempts were made to conjure up images of Neville Chamberlain, but all the while the unseen appeasement was that of George Bush by the poodle that we had as the UK leader, Tony Blair.

As the writer Jürgen Todenhöfer said in a recent article in *The Guardian*,

“War is a boomerang, and it will come to hit us back in the form of terrorism.”

We must be honest with the people about that very real possibility. *The Daily Telegraph*said as much recently when reporting the crash of the Russian Metrojet aircraft in Egypt, which it described as a direct consequence of Russia’s involvement in Syria. It went further, suggesting that Putin might have incited that attack on the Russians. We have to be very sure that we see in our own eyes what we see in the eyes of others.

What do we have in Syria? We have 10 countries bombing, we have Kurds fighting, and we have the Free Syrian Army, which, as we were told earlier by the Chairman of the Defence Committee, is a ragbag of 58 separate factions. We have Assad, and we have Daesh/ISIL. Meanwhile, significantly, Russia bombs our allies but it seems that we will not, or cannot, bomb theirs. We have Turkey bombing a Russian plane, and bombing the Kurds as well. When the Turks bombed the Russian plane, they were taunted by the Greeks; both are members of NATO. Throw in America, France, the United Kingdom and the regional powers, and we have the powder keg of 1914, of which we seem blissfully unaware. All in all, we have a debate about two jets that has led us into something that we should not be going into.

As will be clear to the House, I am against this action for many reasons, but I am also against the way in which the Government are handling the issue. They should have provided more time. They should not have bumped the House into this yesterday, and they know that full well. The United Kingdom is caught between its time of empire and Eisenhower’s military-industrial complex. For that reason, we are being urged that something must be done, even if it is the wrong thing.

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##### 5.3 pm

**Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con):** I am a recently elected Member, and one of the questions that I asked myself before putting myself up for election was whether I would be ready to stand up and be counted on a day like today. I am pleased to be able to add my voice to the debate, and to set out my position. Deciding how to vote on this motion marks one of the most serious and solemn occasions in my life, and I have agonised over how I will vote this evening for longer than I have about virtually any other decision that I have had to make so far.

Let us be clear about what we are deciding on today. This is not a new conflict, but an extension of a conflict in which we are already engaged. Daesh is already our mortal enemy: it hates us and everything that we stand for. What is at stake here is our national security. However, to me, it makes no sense whatever for us to be willing to attack Daesh from the air in Iraq while not being prepared to follow its members into Syria. They are our enemy, and they remain our enemy wherever they are to be found.

We also need to note that extending our air raids into Syria is only one part of the full package of measures in the motion. We all want peace in Syria and the region, and I am pleased that the motion commits us not only to the bombing but to a continuing involvement in finding a political solution in Syria. We want an end to the refugee crisis that has seen thousands upon thousands of Syrian people risking their lives to escape from the terror of Daesh. We want to be able to begin the work of reconstruction in Syria, and to see the country and the region rebuilt and returned to economic stability. The motion commits our country to playing a part in all those things. However, none of them will be possible while Daesh remains able to continue its campaign of terror in that country.

In coming to my decision on how to vote, along with wanting to see a comprehensive package of measures, I had two specific questions to which I needed answers. These were reflected in many of the emails I received from my constituents. First, will extending our military involvement into Syria increase or decrease the risk to our nation? We have to understand that we are already at the top of the list of targets for Daesh; there have already been seven known attacks planned on our country. The reason we have not witnessed scenes of horror on the streets of this country like those seen in Paris is not because we are not a target; it is down to the incredible and excellent work of our security services, to whom we should be eternally grateful. This threat will not go away, or decrease, if we do nothing.

**Kirsty Blackman:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Steve Double:** I will carry on if I can, please, as I am nearly out of time.

My second specific concern related to the risk of civilian casualties. None of us wants to see civilians casualties resulting from the action we take, but we have to face the fact that there are already civilian casualties in Syria as a result of Daesh’s actions. Thousands of people are being murdered, terrorised and enslaved as a result of its activity. Unfortunately, there are nearly always civilian casualties when we engage in war, but I believe that Daesh is already killing more civilians in

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Syria than are ever likely to be caught up in our aerial campaign. Not attacking Daesh will result in more and more civilian casualties. I am comforted to learn that, in the 15 months we have been bombing in Iraq, there have been no reported civilian casualties. That gives me confidence.

Some people say that this is not our fight, and that we should keep out of it and not get involved, but it is already our fight. Our people have already been killed on the beach in Tunisia, and British people were caught up in the attacks in Paris—and it will not end there. This is our fight, and I believe that we should stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies. I will vote with the Government and for the motion this evening.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Mr Speaker:** Order. A four-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now apply.

##### 5.8 pm

**Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab):** Like other hon. and right hon. Members, I have given a great deal of consideration to this matter, to the views of my constituents and colleagues, and to the contributions made in the House today. There is no doubt that these are difficult and complex issues, but I will vote this evening to extend our air strikes into Syria. I want to outline the fundamental issues that have influenced my decision.

First, does Daesh pose a clear and present danger to the UK and our allies? Daesh is an appalling terrorist group, and it is responsible for terrible human rights abuses and war crimes. We have witnessed atrocities on the beaches of Tunisia, on the streets of Paris, Ankara and Beirut, and in the skies above Egypt, and we know that seven Daesh plots against the UK have been disrupted this year alone. There is no doubt that it poses a clear and present danger to the UK at home and abroad, and to our allies.

Secondly, is there international support for military action against Daesh in Syria? The United Nations Security Council resolution states that Daesh poses an “unprecedented threat” to international peace and security, and calls on member states to take “all necessary measures” to deal with Daesh in Syria and Iraq. The resolution is unequivocal; it is asking us to act. Also, following the atrocity in Paris, the French President has made an explicit request to the UK to join airstrikes against Daesh in Syria.

Thirdly, I ask myself what the outcome has been of the UK’s involvement in Iraq against Daesh. The RAF has helped to shrink the territory controlled by Daesh by some 30% and has succeeded in doing great damage to its infrastructure; it has also helped Iraqi security forces and Kurdish peshmerga troops to liberate towns from Daesh.

Fourthly, is the UK already involved in confronting Daesh in Syria? The UK has reconnaissance drone aircraft operating over Syria, and we are providing equipment to forces opposed to both Daesh and Assad in the country. The primary motion under consideration is about not going to war, but extending military action against Daesh into Syria. Given that it does not recognise borders, I see no sense in allowing it safe haven from RAF strikes in one country when we are confronting it in another.

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My fifth question is: is there a comprehensive plan to end the civil war in Syria? Military action can be only part of a wider process involving further political and diplomatic efforts to enable a Syrian peace process. The International Syria Support Group, which includes major regional players and our allies, has been holding constructive discussions in Vienna on this issue, and I am encouraged by the progress being made. A sustainable peace in Syria will help bring to an end the chaos that has allowed Daesh to thrive. On this issue, I would ask the Prime Minister to give assurances that the bravery shown by Kurdish peshmerga forces and the Kurdish community will be recognised, and that they will be engaged in the Vienna process.

I believe there is agreement in this House that Daesh poses a clear and present danger to the UK, and our first duty is to protect our citizens. Therefore, it is not right to expect our allies to fight Daesh in Syria on our behalf. Extending military action against it will not be the cause of plots against the UK—it has already attempted multiple attacks on us over the past year—but I believe that striking at Daesh has the potential to erode its capability of bringing terror to our streets. I will vote in favour of military action.

##### 5.12 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con):** There have been many powerful speeches, and I admire those people who have such a certainty of view about this, which I do not share. I suspect that for that reason many people may find it difficult to support what I am going to say. I am full of doubts, as I think are many good people in the country listening to this debate.

I was talking only yesterday to an Arab friend who lives and works in the region and loves his country. He said, “Really, I think you in the British Parliament are not being honest. You have got to go to war, if you want to, on the basis that your closest friends and allies, the French and Americans, have asked you. If that’s what you want to do, go ahead and do it, but bear in mind that when you go to war, you almost certainly won’t make any difference, and you might make things a lot worse.”

I am afraid that is the rather nuanced opinion of many people in the middle east. I know there is a sense of wanting to be in solidarity with one’s own friends in this Chamber, but I was in this Chamber during that Iraq debate and I was one of only 15 Conservative MPs who voted against. I have not regretted that decision. I have been there and talked to people who have been horribly scarred by war. Tens of thousands of people have lost mothers and sons as a result of our actions, so we have to learn from history. We have to learn the lessons of our involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. We have to approach this debate ultimately not from a party point of view or from a point of view of what is important for our own country, but with a deep sense of humanity and love of peace and care for some of the most vulnerable and traumatised people in the world. We have made terrible decisions that have made the lives of many people in the middle east much worse. So this is a nuanced decision.

I accept that our military involvement will make some difference. I will not repeat all the arguments. I am not competent to comment on Brimstone missiles, but I am sure they will help to degrade ISIL. I accept the

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argument that, if we are bombing ISIL in Iraq, why not in Syria? There is a difference, however, because in Iraq we are supporting a legitimate if inadequate Government, as well as ground forces, whereas the situation in Syria is hopelessly confused. I am afraid we cannot forget that many of us were asked to bomb Mr Assad two years ago. I have heard the phrase, “My enemy’s enemy is my friend,” but, “My enemy’s enemy is my enemy,” is rather more complex.

**Mr Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con):** I do not know whether my hon. Friend agrees with me, but so often we have gone into these places with minimal knowledge of the realties on the ground. For example, most of the people whom we call Daesh in Syria and Iraq are the ordinary Sunnis. We have to give them a more meaningful choice than living under either ISIS or Shi’a militias.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** I agree. I think we are rather arrogant in the way we look at this debate. We want to call ISIL Daesh, but we have to understand that, for whatever reason, many people in the Muslim world who live in the region support ISIL. We find that an extraordinary point of view.

If, by some miracle, our bombing campaign made a difference and we took Raqqa—although, as my right hon. Friend the Chairman of the Defence Committee has explained, there are no credible ground forces to achieve that—what would happen? Would ISIL go away? No, because ISIL is an idea, not just a criminal conspiracy. There are many people in the Muslim world who support this flawed ideology, and we in the west and in this House are not going to defeat it just by military action.

I am not a pacifist. My duty is not to my friends in France, much as I love them, or to the traumatised people in the middle east, but to the people we represent. If, in his summing up, the Foreign Secretary can convince us, not that some people are inspired, but that there is a direct threat to this country from Raqqa and that there is a command and control structure that is planning to kill our people—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members are nodding. Let us hear it from the Secretary of State. If we are acting in self-defence, by all means let us go to war, but let it be a just war, defending our people and in a sense of deep humanity and love of peace.

##### 5.17 pm

**Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP):** Obviously, this is a very difficult decision. I do not think that anybody present wants to be in the position we are in. None of us wants to believe that going into Syria or bombing in Syria is a good decision, but let us be clear that we are not planning to bomb Syria. My understanding is that we are planning to bomb the terrorist regime of ISIS in Syria. My goodness, coming from Northern Ireland, we know what it is like to fight terrorism and to experience people trying scrupulously to assess every movement we make. I have great sympathy for the Prime Minister, the Government and everyone else who has to take this decision, whichever voting Lobby they go through tonight, because it is not easy.

What are the alternatives? Yes, I would love to be able to negotiate with the Syrian Government and with those in the middle east who are genuinely interested in a peaceful outcome, but is that realistic on its own? The case has been made today that this is not going to be the

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silver bullet—it will not be the resolution for everything that will happen—but I sincerely hope it will be part of a process that can bring a positive resolution and a positive outcome.

I would love to be able to say today that we will be at peace in the middle east for the foreseeable future, but that is not the reality. I hope that we have a strategy. I talked to the Prime Minister and some of his officials just last week and one of the challenges I put to them was whether we had a short-term and a long-term strategy to resolve things, rather than just bombings and military action. I asked whether there are overarching strategies to resolve the problem in principle. I have heard since then, I heard that evening when I met the Prime Minister and his officials, and I heard in his statement that there are strategies. None of us can guarantee that they will work positively, but I sincerely hope that they will.

I assure the House that I do not take this decision lightly, and I will be voting for the action proposed by the Prime Minister today. I sincerely want a genuine outcome. I reassure all the people of the western world and the people of the middle east that we stand for a peaceful society. We stand shoulder to shoulder with them and hope that we can reach a genuine resolution that will help not only the people in the Chamber today but our wider society. There is one overarching strategy that we must consider and that is protection for the citizens of the United Kingdom and of the western world. I hope that that is what we are providing today.

##### 5.21 pm

**Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con):** No one who has taken part in the debate today has approached it lightly and I think that we would all agree that anyone who suffers recriminations as a result of whatever decision they reach should have the sympathy of the House. There can be no recriminations and we must be free to express our views as we think fit. We are accountable to our constituents for what we say and what we do.

Notwithstanding the enormous media hype about today’s debate, it is not about a decision to go to war. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) said, this is essentially an extension of the operations we have been carrying out in Iraq since the House decided last year by 524 votes to 43 that the Government should take that action.

It is important to make the point that our intervention in Iraq has been critical. Without that intervention, there is no doubt that ISIL/Daesh would have taken control of the whole country. Had they taken control of Iraq, the consequences for the entire region, let alone us, would have been catastrophic. They would have been in charge of the entire oil output of Iraq and would have caused absolute mayhem. Since we joined the coalition partners in Iraq, at least 30% of the land taken by Daesh has been recovered. The contribution has been worth while and, as so many have said, it clearly makes no sense for Tornado aircraft and the Royal Air Force to have to turn back at the border.

Many people have made the point—most effectively the Prime Minister, if I might say so—about the unique capability that the UK has and that France and the United States have asked us to contribute to this operation.

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I say to the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), who is no longer in his place, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), with whom I am normally in agreement but am not on this occasion, that the Brimstone missile is a unique capability that only the United Kingdom can deploy. One other country has it, but the United Kingdom is the only one that currently can deploy it. That missile has been proven to have a precision strike that reduces the likelihood of civilian casualties to a minimum. Of course there will never be a complete absence of civilian casualties, but Daesh is attacking people every day of the week.

It is also important to note that the United Kingdom has some of the most stringent rules of engagement. I know that from personal experience. I was a Defence Minister involved in the Libyan operations and the painstaking extent to which the military and the politicians act to ensure that the target is legitimate, that it is an important military target and that there is an absence of civilians is extraordinary. The House should be under no illusions: there is no cavalier approach to this. I make that point to the wider public as well.

This is a complex issue but there are some simple truths. First, Daesh’s medieval barbarity is a threat to the region and to us. Secondly, the United Nations Security Council has called unanimously on all states to take all necessary measures. Thirdly, we have that unique additional capability to which I have just referred. Fourthly, we are working flat out on the diplomatic front, through the International Syria Support Group, and there is more that could be done, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) said. However, Daesh will carry on killing, beheading and raping until we stop them doing it to innocent people, and it would be immoral for us to stand aside.

##### 5.25 pm

**Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab):** I apologise for my voice, Mr Speaker, which is hurting me, but I wanted to speak today. Some 12 years ago, I sat over there listening to a very eloquent and emotional speech from the then Prime Minister. We Back Benchers had a lot of pressure on us in that debate, even more than there has been today. I listened to another eloquent speech from a Prime Minister today. Last time I felt an instinct that what we were doing in Iraq was wrong, and I feel that same instinct today.

I am certainly not a pacifist. I was one of the few people, along with Paddy Ashdown, who called for the bombing in Bosnia long before it was Government policy, and I am certainly not a supporter of terrorism, coming as I do from Northern Ireland. I hope the Prime Minister will apologise to me personally, in private, for accusing people such as me, who might be going to vote against this motion, of being in some way in support of terrorism. I take that very personally.

Lots of Members have cited generals and all sorts of important people, but I wish to mention a constituent of mine who was a soldier for nearly 20 years in the regular Army. He wrote to me to say:

“I view with dismay the current clamour to re-engage”

in this war. He says that when we went into Iraq

“I was assured that we had a superb plan that could not fail”,

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that when we went to Afghanistan

“I was told, ‘this is nothing like Iraq’, and when the RAF were sent to bomb Libya they were told ‘this is nothing like Afghanistan.’”

They always get it wrong.

I would not be against bombing to remove Daesh if I really believed it would work, but so many questions need to be answered convincingly and if they cannot be, I believe the action is futile. Do we know who our enemy really is? Is it just Daesh or is it all or many of the multiple jihadi groups? Do we know who our allies are? Is Russia our ally? Is Assad perhaps one now? Is our ally anyone who is against Daesh? Do our allies share our objectives and those of all our other allies? We do not and cannot know that, as it is at least a five-sided war. Can we trust our allies? That shows the trouble with alliances of convenience. What happens when our allies’ interests conflict with ours, as they will? Do we then bomb our allies? Will they bomb us? Are Daesh sufficiently concentrated for us to bomb them without an unacceptable loss of civilian life? Is Daesh under a centralised command structure that can be destroyed through bombing? When Daesh is removed from an area, who will come in to rebuild, repopulate and keep the peace? That issue has been raised by so many people.

**Mr Holloway:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Kate Hoey:** No. Will removing Daesh from Syria by bombing reduce worldwide and, in particular, UK jihadism? Will it increase it, as Muslims react to the deaths? Why do we always have to be the policemen going in first? I have not yet heard a genuinely convincing answer to any of those questions. If they remain unanswered and we still go ahead and bomb civilians, we are being as unthinking and reactionary as some of those people we are fighting.

Daesh is an organisation that has no civilised values. We are fighting a cult that has no moral values whatsoever. Bombing will not change that. We have to look at other, cleverer ways and we have to spend some of the money that we are going to spend on this bombing on guarding our borders and making sure that the work against jihadism and fundamentalism in this country is carried out. There is no moral case for this action and I will be supporting the amendment.

##### 5.29 pm

**Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con):** I do not wish to try the patience of either you, Mr Speaker, or the House by merely repeating comments and arguments that have been made by Members earlier today. If anybody wants to know my opinion, all they need to do is read the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) in*Hansard,*asI completely agree with him.

At heart, my main reason for supporting the motion is simple. We have friends and allies for whom I have great respect, and when they ask us for help, we need to deliver. The French and Americans are asking for our help, because we have special capabilities that they do not currently have in their arsenal.

A constituent emailed me earlier today and said, “What would happen if we needed assistance in the future, but had not helped our allies on this occasion?”

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I could not agree more. I simply say that part of what makes Britain great is the fact that when our friends ask for help, we deliver.

##### 5.30 pm

**Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab):** We all know in our heart of hearts that this debate is not about certainties, but about judgment. I am talking about finely balanced judgment on which the lives of people depend both here and in Syria. What we do know is that defeating Daesh requires strategic action across a number of fronts. We have to take them on ideologically, tackle the causes of their rise, and thwart the grubby financial and trade paths that keep them in business. I accept that military action must be part of the strategy, too.

Last year, when the Yazidis, Christians, Muslims and others were encircled around Mount Sinjar, it was the right decision for the UK to join coalition airstrikes to push Daesh back, to stop further massacres taking place and to provide air cover for the Kurdish and Iraqi Government forces to take back territory from Daesh and to hold it.

Also, I do not accept that if it is morally defensible to use airstrikes against Daesh 200 miles in one direction it becomes morally indefensible to do so 200 miles in another direction simply because there is a border in the middle that Daesh does not recognise. If there is any doubt about the legal situation, it has been answered by UN resolution 2249, and we are already helping the coalition in Syria with refuelling, intelligence and so on.

Where my concerns lie, and what will influence my vote tonight, is whether under the circumstances that we now face RAF participation in airstrikes on the densely populated town of Raqqa makes sense. I have seen no evidence to suggest that there are ground forces there which are capable or have the intention of taking back that town.

**Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)** *rose—*

**Richard Burden:** I am afraid that there is no time, because there are many others who wish to contribute.

That is not what these airstrikes are about. We have been told that they are about degrading Daesh capabilities and communications, which is certainly an important objective. We have also been told that that means not a generalised bombing campaign, but the use by the RAF of sophisticated weapons to minimise civilian casualties. I have asked the Prime Minister to give more information about the rules of engagement, but I have yet to receive a reply. However, I am prepared to believe that the RAF will target its strikes very closely on military targets. The point is that it is not simply RAF planes that will be hitting Raqqa. The town is already being bombed and, as far as I can tell, with a lot less selectivity than it has been suggested the RAF would use.

Recently, I read an article by a reporter in Raqqa who said that there has been a massive escalation in activity since 14 November. The reporter said that civilian casualties were dramatically on the rise and, proportionately, Daesh casualties were going down. Members may or may not like this, but we will be seen as part of that general coalition activity, and we have to ask ourselves whether that will increase or decrease the likelihood of indigenous forces joining us further down the line. Will it build

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support for Daesh or will it reduce it? The risk is very, very real that we will be handing Daesh a propaganda victory on a plate, and we will allow impressionable people to be won over to their murderous brand of jihadism.

Therefore in the absence of evidence that these airstrikes will achieve their military objective, and in the absence of evidence about what that objective is, I have concluded that I shall not vote today for direct UK participation in those strikes on Raqqa.

##### 5.34 pm

**Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), who made some thoughtful remarks. I have come to a different conclusion from him about how to vote, but it is worth reflecting that no Government or MP takes lightly decisions about committing UK forces to combat. Our debate has highlighted the fact that there are no easy answers or solutions to the complex questions raised by the conflict in Syria and the fight with Daesh.

In broad terms, there are three issues that we are considering. First, we are considering the issue of combating extremism at home and the impact that airstrikes may have on that. Secondly, is it right to engage in airstrikes against Daesh, given concerns about our ability to engage in ground combat in an effective and co-ordinated manner, or to support troops in Syria? I believe that the answer is yes, and I shall come on to that. Thirdly, we are considering the issue of protecting civilians and refugees.

On the issue of extremism at home, ISIS, I think we all agree, presents a clear and present danger to the UK and our national security as things stand before the vote. To those who say that we will become a focus for attack if we vote for airstrikes, I would say that it is clear that we are already a target for attack. We have heard that there have been seven plots in the UK linked to ISIS in Syria that have been foiled by the UK police and security services. There is a fundamental threat to our national security, as is self-evident in the information that was passed to the Prime Minister, as he explained today. The answer to the question of whether ISIS presents a threat to our national security at home is clearly yes. In my view, given such a threat, it is in the interests of my constituents and of all hon. Members’ constituents to deal with it and strike ISIS at its heart in Syria and protect British citizens in the process.

On the issue of committing to airstrikes, there are concerns about capability on the ground and support for ground troops. We have heard that there is a patchwork of troops working to fight ISIS on the ground. Military action against ISIS has been taken by a number of our UN allies and other countries and concurrently the Vienna process is under way to build a broader diplomatic alliance. That is work in progress, both in diplomatic terms and in terms of supporting ground troops. The fact that we do not have a perfect solution on the ground and do not have absolutely the right capability to tackle ISIS and support the fight against it in a ground war by various Syrian forces is not a barrier to supporting airstrikes. This is an evolving process, and ISIS poses a threat not just to the UK but to other citizens.

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Finally, on the issue of refugees and civilians, the biggest threat to civilian life in Syria is Daesh/ISIS. There is a refugee crisis in Syria because of Daesh/ISIS acts. On those three points, I support the Government, and I urge colleagues to do the same.

##### 5.38 pm

**John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), who spoke well. I, too, share many of the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), but like the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich I have come to a different conclusion. I have long argued—since the Government tabled a motion 14 months ago to begin airstrikes in Iraq—that it was illogical to stop at the Syrian border, which pinned down our forces. We were satisfied then, even before the recent UN Security Council resolution, of the legality of conflict, and we were prepared to provide extensive logistical support.

I share the concerns expressed so well by many of my colleagues about our ability to bring together ground forces, and in what number; about the viability of the Vienna peace process; about the need to stop the creation of a vacuum into which more extremists can flow; and about the need to recognise that this is not simply a struggle for a year or a couple of years. To defeat this evil ideology may take generations, and it may take far, far more than military ventures. It requires rethinking the way we have engaged on the international stage. We and all our allies need to do much better than we have done.

Setting such concerns as hurdles to be overcome before we allow an existing capability in the region to refocus—not to go to war, as has so often been evocatively stated in the media and in this House today—seems to fly in the face of military logic and common sense. I am concerned that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield feels that he has not been given the information that he wants about the level of precision and the rules of engagement that our RAF forces will bring to the campaign. I feel that I have been given that information. My sense is that our forces are far more precise and our rules of engagement are far tighter. We can therefore bring a great deal of effectiveness, above and beyond what is already there, and it makes sense to do that, rather than keep our forces in an area which is away from the headquarters, particularly as we have been given clear information that that command centre is even now planning missions that would strike at the UK and other countries.

Finally, I have been proud today to sit on the Labour Benches next to my right hon. Friend the Members for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), who made superb speeches. Although there are deeply held views on either side, I will do everything I can to stop my party becoming the vanguard of an angry, intolerant pacifism which sets myriad pre-conditions that it knows will never be met, and which will ultimately say no to any military intervention. *[Interruption.]*Some of those on the Front Bench and those heckling behind me need to think carefully about the way in which they have conducted themselves over recent weeks. We need to do better than this to be a credible official Opposition.

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##### 5.42 pm

**Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con):** Intervention will succeed only if it is part of a coherent strategy and a coherent political strategy. Both are needed. I have yet to hear them in the statements from Ministers, although I very much want to hear them.

First, on the military strategy, degrading ISIL’s capacity from the air will achieve little unless it is followed by effective use of ground forces. But President Obama has ruled out committing ground troops, as has the Prime Minister, so the question of where those troops are going to come from is paramount. The Prime Minister appears to be insisting that Assad, who still has significant forces in theatre, has no part in the future of Syria. In that case, the ground war rests largely with the Kurds, who are less well organised than they are in Iraq, and on the reported 70,000 non-extremist fighters, but the reality of those seems to have faded somewhat in recent days.

Secondly, and even more important, there is the political strategy. Before military action can be justified, we need to have arrived at the point where the main intervening powers are agreed at least about the broad outlines of a settlement. But that is not evident either. In fact, the military action that has recently been taking place in Syria vividly illustrates the absence of a strategy. A handful of outside powers are attacking or assisting a patchwork of different opponents, some of whom are fighting each other. The political objectives of the western powers and current military action to further them and the political objectives of the Russians are contradictory. The Russians have attacked the groups that the west sees as the potential salvation of Syria. The US and France want to remove the regime that the Russians have been seeking to entrench.

For military action to have a reasonable prospect of succeeding, we will need agreement among the major powers about the use and objectives of air power, about whom we are and are not targeting, about how the boots on the ground will get there, and about whose boots they will be.

**James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con):** My right hon. Friend refers to the objectives of air power. For those of us who have been listening to the debate, there is a feeling that those arguing against the motion have failed to answer the question of whether they support the action in Iraq, where since last September air power has been deployed very effectively in restricting ISIL’s progress and defending Baghdad against terrorists.

**Mr Tyrie:** I agree with that. There is a fundamental difference between Iraq and Syria. Iraq is a democracy, at least of sorts, and it has invited us in and is sharing with us the enduring responsibility for what goes on there. If we engage in Syria, we will be picking up the enduring responsibility for a failed state.

A political plan is absolutely essential. That will require at least a measure of agreement on a policy for regional stability. That can be achieved only in collaboration with the Russians, and probably the Iranians. There are some grounds for cautious optimism in that regard. I have very little time to talk about it but, in a nutshell, I do not think that there is enough.

In the absence of both a military and a political strategy, the west might only succeed in supressing ISIL temporarily. In time, an equally virulent Islamist-inspired, anti-western militancy may well return.

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The ruling out of western ground forces is very significant. It tells us that, after Iraq and Afghanistan, the west appears to lack the will, and perhaps the military strength, to commit the resources that might be needed to construct a new order from the shaken kaleidoscope of Syria. As in Libya, it would be relatively easy to remove a brutal dictator from the air, and perhaps also to suppress ISIL, but it would be extremely difficult to construct a regime more favourable to our long-term interests.

We do not need to look into a crystal ball to see that; we can read the book. The result of over a decade of intervention in the middle east has been not the creation of a regional order more attuned to western values and interests, but the destruction of an existing order of dictatorships that, however odious, was at least effective in supressing the sectarian conflicts and resulting terrorism that have taken root in the middle east. Regime change in Iraq brought anarchy and terrible suffering. It has also made us less safe.

Above all, it has created the conditions for the growth of militant extremism. We should be under no illusions: today’s vote is not a small step. Once we have deployed military forces in Syria, we will be militarily, politically and morally deeply engaged in that country, and probably for many years to come. That is why the Government’s description of the extension of bombing to Syria as merely an extension of what we were already doing in Iraq is misplaced. We simply have not heard enough from the Government about exactly what the reconstruction will mean.

The timing of this vote has everything to do with the opportunity to secure a majority provided by the shocking attacks in Paris. Everybody feels a bond with the French, but an emotional reflex is not enough. Military action might be effective at some point, but military action without a political strategy is folly. We have yet to hear that strategy, so I cannot support the Government’s motion tonight.

##### 5.48 pm

**Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab):** We are fighting and losing the wrong war. This is a war of hearts and minds that can never be won with bombs and bullets. The situation is truly terrifying, and we underestimate it if we imagine that it is confined to a couple of countries. People who have been brought up in this country, gone to our schools and absorbed our culture and values find themselves seduced by the message of Daesh. Two such people went to Syria from Cardiff and are now dead. They gave their lives to this mad, murderous cult. We must examine why they did that.

The reason is that Daesh’s narrative is very cleverly conceived to appeal to adolescents. It offers danger, adventure in foreign parts and martyrdom. It also deepens the sense of victimhood by churning up all the stories from the middle ages about how the wicked Christian crusaders slaughtered without mercy the Muslims. We must challenge that dialogue of hate. We must have a different narrative. There is a good narrative for us to take up, because in the past 200 years we have had great success in places like Cardiff and Newport in building up mixed communities of races and religions.

We must not imagine that anything will be over as a result of what happens in Syria or Iraq. This has spread throughout the world—throughout Asia and throughout

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South America. There is hardly a country in the world where Daesh does not want to spread its hatred. It has a worldwide plan to divide the world into Muslim communities and Christian communities that are at war. In other countries there is great suffering in many of the Christian communities that are being persecuted. We are falling into the trap it designed in Sharm el-Sheikh, Tunisia and Paris to pull us on to the punch. It is saying, “This is the way to get a world war going. This is the way to incite the west to send in military people and have a world war.” This is precisely what it wants—it has said so. It wants a world war and we must not fall into the trap.

We have heard today throughout this House some very good, sincere speeches, but I believe that the combination of two dangerous views, “Something must be done” and “Give war a chance”, leads us to the position that we are now in. Those of us who were in the House when we went to war in Iraq were told, by the same people who are telling us now that there are 70,000 friendly troops, that there were definitely weapons of mass destruction there. There were not. In 2006, we were told that we could go into Helmand with no chance of a shot being fired. We lost 454 of our soldiers there. Little has been achieved. Because of decisions taken in this House in the past 20 years, we have lost the lives of 633 of our soldiers. I believe that if we go in now, nothing much will happen. There will be no improvement—we will rearrange the rubble, perhaps—but we will strengthen the antagonism and deepen the sense of victimhood among Muslims worldwide; they will have another excuse. We must not fall into that trap. We need to have a counter-dialogue, and get it into the media and on to the world wide web, to say that there is a great story to be told of harmony in our country. We must put that forward as a genuine alternative.

##### 5.52 pm

**Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie) and the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn). I shall have to endeavour to explain to them why I think they are both mistaken in their conclusions.

All of us in this House have acknowledged, and indeed it is a legitimate subject of debate, that the condition of the middle east is frankly pretty close to being catastrophic. There are powerful forces at work pulling civil society apart. There is sectarian conflict. There are a whole variety of grievances that have been exploited by various dictators throughout the ages, and that is regularly being repeated. All the signs are that in many places the structure is extremely fragile, and we are very fortunate that in one or two areas it is subsisting.

We can all agree on that, and I also agree that the situation is not amenable to any easy solution, or we would have found it a long time ago, but none of that explains to me logically why some hon. Members in this House consider that action in extending our military operations against Daesh into Syria is wrong. If it is indeed wrong, then our intervention in Iraq 12 months ago was wrong, whereas all the analysis that I have seen suggests to me that it is the one thing that has prevented the situation from wholly spinning out of control. We have

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a remarkable tendency in this House—perhaps it is a good thing in a democracy—to look at our shortcomings and not look at the benefits of what we may have achieved. It seems to me that if we had not intervened, there was a serious risk that generalised war would have broken out in the middle east, with Iranian intervention in Iraq to prop up the Iraqi regime and, ultimately, intervention by Saudi Arabia as well. We ought to look on the bright side of what has been achieved and then consider whether the limited steps that have been proposed are reasonable. It seems to me that they are. They are not a solution to the problem, and to that extent, the challenge remaining for my right hon. Friends through the Vienna process is a very real one. It does not seem to me that those limited steps will make matters worse. What they show is a comity of interest with our allies, to whom we are committed, to try to do something to address this problem and to keep it under control until better solutions can be found. That seems to me to be a legitimate and proportionate response to the problem that we face.

It has been suggested that this will all in some way run away with itself. It will not do so if the House is vigilant. The legal basis for intervention is very limited: every action that is taken hereafter will have to be necessary and proportionate to achieve a legitimate aim that is severely circumscribed. I have every confidence that my right hon. and learned Friend and my hon. and learned Friend the Law Officers will be able to deal with that, and every confidence that my colleagues in the Government will observe the limits.

It has been suggested that we will not be able to engage in diplomacy. I have to say I was staggered to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) say that we ought to emulate the Chinese in this matter, rather than the French. I find that an extraordinary notion.

**Stephen Gethins:** As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) quite rightly made the point that the UK can maintain its influence without taking military action that will have a marginal effect.

**Mr Grieve:** If I may say so, the question that should be asked is a different one: does our involvement diminish our ability to exercise diplomatic influence? The hon. Gentleman fails to take into account that by withdrawing from the military process entirely, as he is clearly advocating, we diminish our ability to influence the allies who share our values in this matter. That is why I found the suggestion that we should emulate China so astonishing.

Finally, there is an issue of great importance about Islamophobia and the structures of our own society. The hon. Member for Newport West touched on it, and he has my very considerable sympathy; he probably knows that I have had an interest in this matter for many years. I have absolutely no doubt that Islamophobia is on the rise in this country and, indeed, that the backwash coming out of the middle east threatens to undermine our civil society. That is a very real challenge that everybody in the House ought to address. In that regard, my criticisms of the Prevent strategy are well known. I must say that I do not believe what we are doing in Syria undermines that one jot. On the contrary, I would have thought that a sense of powerlessness in

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the face of the murderous cruelty of Daesh is one of the most likely causes fuelling Islamophobia in this country. A rational policy enacted and proceeded with by the Government—with, I hope, the support of many Members of the House—seems to me to be a better way forward.

##### 5.57 pm

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP):** Since our election in May, all new MPs have faced a range of new experiences and challenges. Today’s vote will of course mark one of the most significant decisions we have taken in our careers to date, and we do not wear it lightly.

I respect the sincerity with which the Prime Minister made his case today, but I express disappointment at the words he chose to use last night to describe those who, with equal sincerity, disagree with his view. Those of us who find ourselves supporting the amendment to the Government’s motion have also thought long and hard about our decision and the enormous consequences it will have for so many. We have each listened to our constituents and organisations the length and breadth of the country who have contacted us to share their views. We have also considered, and we acknowledge, the outstanding service of the brave women and men of our armed forces, who put their lives on the line to protect us every day.

As well as thinking about our own security, we have thought about the security of the people of Syria. Although much of today’s discussion has been about the Government’s motion, and the efficacy or otherwise of military action, there is another important perspective on this catastrophic situation—that of the people of Syria and those in the middle east who have been so deeply and tragically affected by this conflict, and whether adding to the multiple countries already bombing Syria will help them, or indeed our security, at all.

**Hannah Bardell:** Does my hon. Friend agree that in all our discussions and considerations, we must think about the human cost on the ground, in particular among vulnerable groups, such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community, which we have not talked about and which is being persecuted—*[Interruption.]* One Member made a brief mention of it. Those communities are already being persecuted and further bombing will only make the situation worse.

**Ms Ahmed-Sheikh:** I implore Members of the House to show the same respect to us that we have given to them in listening to their interventions. My hon. Friend’s intervention has been heard and I agree with it in its entirety.

More than half the Syrian population are living in poverty and civilian casualties are on the rise. The recent Russian airstrikes have killed 485 civilians, including 117 children and 47 women. The facts relating to this vicious conflict are alarming and it is difficult to imagine the human stories that lie behind them. That is why I visited the Nizip refugee camp near Gaziantep to see for myself the scale of the humanitarian disaster and to hear at first hand the accounts of refugees who have fled Syria. I listened as people told me how their families had been uprooted by violence. They wanted nothing more than to return home. I heard that their towns and villages had been reduced to rubble by airstrikes—airstrikes ordered by President Assad.

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I spoke to Nafa al Hasan from Idlib, whose house was flattened by Assad’s forces in an attack that killed her mother, father, brother and husband. I met Basil from Damascus, who had spent two years in prison being tortured by Assad’s security services. He is now unable to walk and is confined to a wheelchair. Mohammed was a pilot in the Syrian air force. He fled the country with his family when he was asked to take part in bombing raids on civilian targets in his own country. Salwa, who is a writer, said to me:

“We are not numbers. We are not animals. We want to be human beings, not numbers on a page. I am not a woman after this. I have no dreams. I just want to go home, but Daesh are occupying my home now.”

Those individuals and families were united in their desire to return home one day to rebuild their lives.

Those people are human beings with a story, and that story should be heard. It is a story that confirms to us all the complex nature of what is happening in the region and the number of protagonists who are already involved. Crucially, those protagonists have different agendas and different targets.

Many issues must be addressed if Syria is to be returned to peace, but the proposals before us today will not do that. We need a plan to defeat the terrorist cult Daesh and to replace Assad. We also need a plan to rebuild Syria and to provide a better future for the people I have mentioned and so many more. To join the ongoing bombing campaign in the skies over Syria will only compound the human suffering. A military intervention without credible peace-building plans will only make the situation worse, just as it did in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

A comprehensive strategy to act against Daesh is required. The UK could take the lead in a more co-ordinated effort to identify and squeeze Daesh’s finances and disrupt its illegal trade. We could lead a diplomatic initiative, using our non-combative position to secure a long-term peace plan. That is not in today’s motion. That is why I will support the amendment and vote against the Government motion.

##### 6.3 pm

**Mr Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con):** Since I was 18, I have spent a large portion of my life as a soldier, television reporter and MP in some of the more unhappy places in the world. What has struck me is the blindingly obvious point that war and conflict are the result of broken politics. Over the past 15 years or so, our country has made some disastrous decisions that have left tens of millions of people in the middle east and north Africa in a very difficult position.

One middle eastern ambassador told me last week on the Foreign Affairs Committee’s trip to Iraq and Turkey, “You have to diagnose a sickness properly in order to treat its root causes. Palliative therapy is not a cure.” So what do we have in Syria and Iraq? When we think of ISIS, we think of Jihadi John, with the terrifying offering in orange in front of him, but the reality is that ISIS is mostly made up of the Sunni populations of those areas. Our challenge, if we ever want to cure this problem, is to separate those disfranchised Sunnis from what we might call core ISIS.

We have got to give the Sunni in the middle east a different choice. At the moment their choice is ISIS and security from Shi’a militias, or Shi’a militias. Of course

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airstrikes play their part, but to me they are much lower down the “to do” list. We must have a proper political and security strategy so that we can separate those mass populations from ISIS. Those people are ultimately our ground troops against ISIS, and until we realise that, we’re stuffed.

Last week a very senior coalition commander in Iraq told us:

“We have a military campaign. We don’t have a political one.”

Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the US are all doing their own thing. Think about that—I do not have time to go through it now.

Politicians in the Chamber this afternoon have given expert opinions on military matters, but we have come up a bit short when talking about the politics. Nevertheless, it is mainly politics that will fix this situation. The biggest thing that the United Kingdom can do right now is to use the influence that we think we do not have to talk to people seriously, so that we have a proper long-term strategy that results in a cure. Bombing can only ever be palliative. *[Interruption.]* I cannot take an intervention because I’m done.

**Mr Speaker:** We are extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Most helpful indeed.

##### 6.6 pm

**Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC):** I will be voting for the amendment tonight, as will my colleagues in Plaid Cymru.

Earlier this afternoon, the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard)—he is no longer in his place—referred, with a magisterial wave, to parties on these Opposition Benches as the “pacifist parties.” Plaid Cymru is not a pacifist party, as was confirmed only yesterday by our leader in the national Assembly. We opposed military action in Iraq, but we supported it in Libya, although now I have my doubts.

I have many concerns about the Government’s proposals, but I will not list them all. The Prime Minister said that 70,000 moderate Syrian fighters would supply the boots on the ground that he—rightly, in my view—will not commit to himself. That assertion is absent from the motion, and my impression is that supporters of the bombing have become increasingly coy on that matter. No surprise there.

We have been presented many times with a false choice, a false dichotomy. We have heard that we must either bomb or do nothing, but surely we can either bomb or do things that, in my view, are reasonable, proportionate and effective. For example, we could provide further support for the peshmerga—the force that has proved itself to be so effective against Daesh, against the odds and with very few resources. Pressure could be put on Turkey to desist from attacking the Kurds so that they can both concentrate on defeating Daesh.

What can we do to secure a future for the Kurds in southern and western Kurdistan, and to secure a settlement for the Kurds in eastern Anatolia? No one has yet made that point this afternoon, but it is a small but essential part of the jigsaw. Daesh does not act alone, and it is abundantly clear that they are killers, not talkers. Daesh

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has international sponsors who provide it with money and material. What further pressure can we put on the Gulf states and their citizens, and on Turkey, to stop the supply of resources that Daesh needs to wage its evil war?

Syria is not some distant land of which we know little. Daesh and its supporters are eager to wage war on the streets of western Europe, but those who perpetrated that foul work in Paris were home-grown, as were those who bombed London. Terrorists are being trained in Syria, but they are radicalised through the specious arguments of those who see oppression everywhere and who misuse distortions of Islam to inspire mayhem and murder. That is being done here and on the internet, and we could take steps in that respect. I will not speak about the Vienna process because of pressure on time.

Members have asked whether bombing will make us safer, and some have said that we are proposing to keep our heads down. In terms of more bombings in the west, if we bomb Syria, we will be sowing a further 1,000 dragons’ teeth. Not bombing is also a serious security consideration, however. It is not just a matter of keeping our heads down.

I was in this House when Tony Blair, at his persuasive best, convinced a majority that Britain was in imminent danger of attack and that we should wage war in Iraq. As has already been said, 2003 is not 2015, but we are still waiting for the Chilcot report. I am not starry-eyed about the prospects for that report, but I believe its earlier publication would have been valuable in informing this debate. The delay is deeply regrettable.

##### 6.10 pm

**Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con):** There is a strong pacifist tradition in this country that often requires courage to hold to. We have seen that in conflicts down the years. I have respect for those who could never support military action in any circumstances, wrong though I believe them sometimes to be. The rest of us have to reach a settled view on whether the proposal before us tonight is right or wrong. My view is that, on balance, it is right.

I come, like many hon. Members, from what one might call the post-Iraq generation. My default position is to apply a healthy dose of scepticism to any request for military intervention. We can all think of a great many reasons—they have been listed on all sides of the House—why not going ahead with an extension of the air campaign is the right thing to do. I entirely concede that it is not without risks. We have to understand, however, the true impact of saying that we will sit this out. If we say that and accept that air attacks have limited Daesh’s ability to operate in mass formations and conduct clear command and control operations and so on, we are, in the words of the Prime Minister, subcontracting out our security to our friends

In the past few days, we have seen many of the reasons not to proceed fall away: a unanimous UN resolution; a political and diplomatic process involving key parties is under way; and a greater understanding of what an air campaign is and is not.

**Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con):** I agree with my hon. Friend wholeheartedly that we need to

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take action, however difficult. ISIL wants to destroy everything we believe in through its murderous acts. We need to act and to act now.

**Richard Benyon:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

One of the main arguments put by a number of colleagues—even by the Chairman of the Defence Committee, on which I sit, a few days ago—is that air campaigns are only successful with little green men in battalions moving along the ground underneath the top cover provided by the RAF. In a perfect world, that is how we use air cover. We do not live a perfect world, however. I asked one my constituents––someone who knows a bit about this, General Sir Mike Jackson––whether he could remember any conflict where air power alone made a difference. He thought and said one word: Kosovo. He then started to recite other circumstances in which an air campaign can diminish an enemy, a point very ably made by the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett).

We have now moved on to question the existence of the so-called 70,000 combatants. We can all dance on the head of a pin and say the reason why we cannot support the motion tonight is that they may not all be the kind of people we like, or that they might not immediately be an effective force on the ground. But they are there. They have not signed up to Assad or to the evil death cult we are targeting, and we have to use them. After the failures of the Iraq war, we have at least an independent and analytical organisation, the Joint Intelligence Committee, to provide the details. They are not being provided by politicians or their advisers. We can quibble about who these people are, but broadly speaking, since the Prime Minister raised the figure of 70,000 it has more or less stacked up. They are militias, some local, but through the four-year civil war they are still there and we should use them.

Standing by our allies at this time, particularly France, matters. Not stepping up now would give the impression that we are happy to subcontract our security. That would leave Britain’s role in the world in a very different place in the minds of our friends and our enemies. Britain’s place in the world, however, is not reason enough for armed conflict. Reason enough is found by recognising that the threat is right here and right now to the thousands of my constituents who travel to London every day to work or to attend peaceful events such as those that were taking place in the Bataclan theatre or the cafés where lovers and friends met in a way that we would want to see in every town and city in this country. The proposed action is limited, legal and has the authority of the UN. In supporting the motion tonight, we will be taking the fight, with our friends, to the heart of the ground controlled by one of the most hideous death cults of modern times.

##### 6.15 pm

**Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab):** There are obviously strongly held views both for and against taking action, and I believe that we should respect views that are contrary to our own. I am convinced, however, of the merits of the case to extend military action into Syria.

It seems to me impractical to take military action on the Iraqi side of the border without being able to participate in military action on the Syrian side where

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Daesh/ISIL is strong, where its headquarters are situated, from where it supplies its forces in Iraq and from where it is organising attacks on the streets of the UK. This is a matter of national security and we need to act in self-defence. I do not accept that if we take action in Syria, it will increase the possibility of terrorist threats on the streets of the UK, because that threat exists now. They are out to get us, because they do not agree with our way of life and want to end it. It is a fallacy to believe that if we leave ISIL alone, it will leave us alone. We need to degrade and destroy it; we need to play our part. We bring to the table military ordnance that will help to target ISIL operatives specifically, while limiting the threat to civilian life.

We have heard a lot about the Brimstone missile—a missile that can be launched from an RAF jet and target ISIL in such a way as to avoid civilian casualties. Lieutenant-General Gordon Messenger, the deputy chief of the defence staff, said:

“The thresholds for approving the strikes are high and the skills sets are high, as yet the UK has not had a civilian casualty incident after months of bombing”—

and he means in Iraq. We have heard much about the Syrian ground forces that can or cannot help to destroy ISIL. The strategy on the ground should not prevent the RAF’s involvement in air strikes. The ISIL strategy must be implemented first to suppress its ability to launch attacks on our streets. If the air strikes limit the opportunity of ISIL to attack us, we should take part in them. I believe it is important that we support our allies.

I do not know how I could face my constituents if we voted no tonight and, God forbid, there was a terrorist attack in the UK or on a beach in Tunisia and we had not done everything in our power to prevent it. What do we say to our allies who are taking military action when we are not with them after such an incident? Do we say, “Get on with it, but sorry, our involvement in military action in Syria stops on the Iraqi side of the border”, even though we know the attack on the UK was organised from Syria? If we do not take part in this action, I believe we will be letting down our country and our allies, and will reduce our credibility in the international arena.

My prime motivation for supporting this motion today is the protection of our citizens. The wider strategy, both political and diplomatic, is important. It will not happen overnight, and neither will the involvement of ground forces. Our military involvement may be small, but our aircraft can use weaponry that the coalition does not have—weaponry that is precise, limits casualties and can suppress ISIL activities. It is not a complete answer in itself, but it is a start. It will buy us time to deploy a wider strategy. I feel uneasy about Britain not taking part in airstrikes when we know that it is a matter of self-defence. I will therefore support the motion tonight.

##### 6.24 pm

**Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con):** I have the greatest respect for all colleagues in all parties who have spoken so eloquently against military action in Syria. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) spoke passionately about the risks of being drawn into a vicious civil war. That is why I voted against taking action in Syria two years ago. However, I believe that this has gone beyond a civil war and that ISIS is

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bringing the fight to us and would do so again on the streets of Britain as it has on the beaches of Tunisia and in Paris. This is an enemy with which there can be no dialogue. This is an enemy that has perpetrated enslavement, rape, child rape, torture and mass murder throughout the territories that it now controls. I believe that there is a compelling case for us not only to stand with our allies tonight, but to stand with the United Nations as it calls for us to take every action that we can against Daesh. I believe that there is also a case for standing with the civilians on the ground, given that our military action against Daesh in Iraq has so far helped to push it back, and to prevent the kind of atrocities that we have been witnessing across Syria and Iraq today.

**Kirsty Blackman:** Airstrikes, by their nature, are intended to inflict death, pain and suffering on people and families, some of whom will be innocent. Will someone please tell me how this action will stop new people becoming radicalised, how it will stop new terrorists, and how it will improve the human rights situation on the ground?

**Dr Wollaston:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, because I think that it goes to the heart of the matter—and the heart of the matter, I would say to her, is that people are already suffering and being tortured throughout these territories. I would say to her that the action we have taken so far in Iraq—very careful, measured action—has, in fact, reduced the kind of civilian casualties to which she has referred. I am wrestling with this, just as she is, on behalf of my constituents, and I would say that the majority of my constituents who have contacted me agree with her. It is, therefore, with a very heavy heart that I am trying to make the case to them for my belief that action is now not only in our national interest, but in the interest of the civilians who risk being taken over by an evil that is beyond our imagining, here in the comfortable world that we inhabit in the UK.

I would say to the hon. Lady that these people have no hesitation whatsoever in perpetrating the most barbaric atrocities. I would point to the Yazidi women and girls—more than 5,000 of them—who have been kidnapped and are being held in conditions of enforced slavery, and, indeed, to child rape, which is allowed by Daesh. I would ask the hon. Lady whether she would like to spare civilians across Iraq and Syria that fate—the fate that awaits them. But I agree that these are very heavy considerations.

I would also say, as the proud daughter of an air force family, that our air forces are already putting their lives on the line in the skies above Iraq. I would like to call on the Leader of the Opposition—but he is no longer in the Chamber—to reflect on how much it will mean to the forces’ families who are following the debate today to know that they cannot count on his support. I think that although we all take, respectfully, different views about the risks, or indeed the consequences, of extending our action to Syria, it is essential for him to state unequivocally his support for our armed forces in the skies above Iraq.

For the benefit of any of us who are considering how to vote, let me focus for a moment on the consequences of inaction. Our first responsibility in the House is to protect the citizens of this country, and I believe that it

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is only a matter of time before mass casualty attacks such as those that we have witnessed on the streets of Paris and around the world are perpetrated in the UK. I think that we must all ask ourselves whether there is a greater sin in omission than in commission. I feel, very strongly, that there is now a compelling case for us to be able to look in the eye the families of those who may lose their lives in future, and to be able to say that we did absolutely everything we could to diminish the powers of this evil organisation.

This is the fascist war of our generation. We had to take action against fascism in Europe, and I think there is a compelling case for us to say that we have done everything we can today.

##### 6.24 pm

**Jim Dowd (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). She says she is from an RAF family; my father served in the Royal Air Force for 15 years, including all the years of the second world war, so we have that in common. In fact, I was born at the RAF base in Gütersloh in Germany.

When Bill Clinton was first elected President of the USA, the slogan was, “It’s the economy, stupid.” That was thought to be the primary reason for people voting as they do in elections. I do not disagree with that entirely, but I believe that people have a higher consideration as well. It is the primary duty of any Government, or any party purporting to form a Government, to do anything and everything necessary to protect the people, their families and their homes. If any party, Parliament or Government do not do that, they will pay a terrible price. That is what people expect the Government to do. I am sure that everyone in the Chamber agrees with that. Perhaps the only question we have to answer is how best we can protect our citizens and communities.

Hon. Members have said that we should accept the genuine depth of feeling on this issue on both sides. I am grateful to the many constituents who have contacted me with their views. Many have sent formalised messages given to them by other organisations, but I do not dispute their belief in what they were saying and doing. I am particularly grateful to the constituents who said, “Even if you don’t agree with me, I hope you will do what you think is right,” and that is what I intend to do this evening.

Others have said that the debate is out of all proportion, because we are not talking about a new engagement. We are talking about a variation on the commitment that the House overwhelmingly endorsed not so long ago. There will of course be complications. Actually, I have some sympathy with those who have said that the effect will be only marginal. That might well be true, but the question is: is it worth doing or not? We need to decide which side of the argument to come down on.

I will certainly not vote for the amendment, for a number of reasons, not least because of the weasel words and sophistry it employs to suggest that the case has not been made. That is the kind of thing the Liberals used to say before 2010, when they had to face up to genuine responsibility. It is like when people say, “I take a principled stand on this.” They seem to be suggesting that they are principled and that anyone who

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opposes them is unprincipled, but that is not true. The fact is that people can have genuine, deeply held views on this matter, and we should respect their views—

**Alex Salmond:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jim Dowd:** No I will not, thank you very much, because there are plenty of people waiting to get in—

**Alex Salmond** *rose—*

**Jim Dowd:** Oh all right, as you’ve got your gang with you. Go on!

**Alex Salmond:** For the hon. Gentleman’s information, the wording of the cross-party amendment is exactly the same as that of the amendment that tried to stop the war in Iraq. A lot of people think that it would have been a better thing if that amendment had been carried that day.

**Jim Dowd:** I do not dispute that for a moment, but I am not sure what point the right hon. Gentleman is making, so I shall move on.

People set up barriers. They say, “We must have a UN resolution.” Then, when the UN comes forward with a resolution, they say, “Oh no! That’s not good enough. We want a better-quality UN resolution. Tell it to go do its homework. Tell it to do better.” It is ridiculous. These are weasel words in the amendment; they are euphemisms. It is almost as though those who say that the case has not been made think they have a higher moral standard, a transcendent judgment superior to that of those who disagree with them.

I just want to say this to the Prime Minister: the Brimstone missile about which we have heard so much is known as a fire-and-forget weapon—*[Interruption.]* Well, it is known by some as that; maybe not by Conservative Members. It has been described as a fire-and-forget weapon, but the motion, which I find comprehensive and persuasive, is not a fire-and-forget motion. If we pass it tonight, we will have to come back to it and address all the issues raised in it. We must make sure that nobody is pretending that airstrikes alone will solve the problems in the middle east. There is much more to be done, and we will need dedication, effort and application to ensure that we do as much as we can to bring peace and a degree of stability to that troubled part of the world.

##### 6.29 pm

**John Glen (Salisbury) (Con):** I rise to speak in this debate with a degree of apprehension—apprehension that I am sure everyone who has contributed felt—about the implications and outcomes of what I hope we will this evening collectively mandate our brave forces to engage in, but I also speak with absolute clarity in my conscience that supporting this motion is the right thing to do.

In Daesh, we face an enemy that will not ever be willing to sit down and discuss its grievances, and will not bargain with the west through intermediaries, because it does not have any. Why is that? It is because it despises us simply for who we are. When we meet an enemy like that, we cannot back off. We cannot cite past misjudgments in Iraq, the nature of the Saudi arms

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trade, or the lack of progress in disrupting the oil trade as justification for not supporting this motion. We must realise that this evil force does threaten our security. It cannot be contained in some far-off land as we continue to close our eyes, stick our fingers in our ears and imagine it will go away; it will not, and Daesh will not.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** The decision for us in the House tonight is this: to protect our citizens in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the decision must be taken to go to Raqqa and ensure that those involved in the campaign to organise attacks in France, Belgium and elsewhere are stopped, that the source of money is stopped, and that Raqqa is taken over and the people who live there have their freedom and their liberty.

**John Glen:** Not for the first time, I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. As we saw in Paris, as our domestic security leaders tell us, and as the many desperate refugees flooding into continental Europe testify, the implications of this evil are real, and I do not believe any realistic alternative course of action exists that properly deals with the nature of this threat.

My concern is this: we must accept that to defeat this evil we need a grand strategy covering humanitarian, military, political and security dimensions, and this will likely require more time than many of us, and perhaps of our constituents, want to contemplate. Special precision-strike Tornadoes will not be enough. We will need to embrace uncomfortable compromises with Iran, Russia and Assad himself.

Syria will not become benign in its outlook until a comprehensive long-term political solution is found that demonstrates acute sensitivity to many conflicting but co-existing outlooks. Yet this political solution does not have a hope of success until we realise that some enemies of our way of life and freedoms cannot be hidden from. They cannot, and will not, become less lethal. They will not diminish unless we take military action to degrade them—a task we cannot justifiably outsource to our French and American allies.

Let us be clear: although I believe it is true that air power will not defeat this enemy by itself, it will not be defeated on the ground alone either. We will need a co-ordinated approach involving an Arab coalition, NATO, Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, and the Iraqi and Syrian armies, but our airstrikes are instrumental to our task of defeating this evil.

I want to address the argument that bombing Syria will not stop jihadi bombers already in the UK or France. No, I do not believe it will, but that is to misunderstand the comprehensive strategy that must be employed, and is now being employed. Special forces, the police and the intelligence services are well positioned to prevent these atrocities, but the severe risk we currently face is unlikely to diminish if we fail to support today’s motion. If we fail to act, the evil heart pumping life into this death cult will remain healthy. Finally, we must not underestimate the scale of the humanitarian crisis facing Syria, or the time and resources needed to help bring order to that country.

I have thought very carefully about these matters. There is much I do not know—I concede that—but my conscience is clear. We must act and begin the long,

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intense, delicate and difficult process of facing up to a profound evil. I support the motion and our Prime Minister’s compelling case.

##### 6.35 pm

**Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab):** I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen), who spoke with great integrity.

The Prime Minister has been plausible in public, but graceless in private. I and other colleagues who will vote against his motion tonight are not “terrorist sympathisers”. He was wrong to say that we are. The Prime Minister wants us to take action, but he is not prepared to take action that, in my view, is adequate to the task. The House is being presented with a false choice. The Prime Minister wants us to believe that the choice is between taking the inadequate action proposed by the Government and taking no action. That is vacuous. I want effective, comprehensive action that will ensure an adequate ground force, under United Nations authority, made up not of western countries, whose presence can only inflame the situation, but of predominantly Islamic countries, particularly Sunni countries.

The Prime Minister’s statement and the Government response to the Foreign Affairs Committee talked repeatedly of the moderate opposition, but the opposition in Syria is neither unitary nor moderate. It is wrong of the Government to try to present it as being otherwise.

The Prime Minister knows that the United States had a programme to train and equip Syrian rebels to fight against Daesh. It was so unsuccessful in identifying any capable, trustworthy allies in action against Daesh that it was abandoned in September. Every single expert witness to the Select Committee said that there are “thousands” of disparate groups; allegiances are like shifting sands, and there are few moderates left.

In September the US announced that, instead of training people, it would focus on distributing weapons and ammunition to existing groups. The House may consider that distributing arms to groups whose members are increasingly radicalised and defecting to Daesh is a very foolish strategy indeed that risks doing more to strengthen Daesh than to eradicate it.

**Imran Hussain:** Does my hon. Friend agree that a number of individuals who trained on that programme ended up joining al-Qaeda?

**Barry Gardiner:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right and simply reinforces my point. I want to eradicate Daesh. Doing so requires an effective ground force that can co-ordinate with the existing allied airstrikes in Syria—airstrikes that, in the words of Lieutenant General Sir Simon Mayall, are

“not a war-winning…campaign”.

Airstrikes can create a temporary opportunity for territorial gain, but in default of a competent ground force, that opportunity is squandered—and at what cost?

The population of Raqqa who are subjugated under Daesh will not be allowed into the tunnels. They will not be whisked out of the city in armoured jeeps with Daesh commanders. They will remain in the city and wait for British bombs. All military action comes with

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the risk that innocent lives will be lost; I understand that. Sometimes that risk must be accepted, but only when the military and diplomatic strategy that is put forward is coherent and comprehensive and has a reasonable chance of achieving its objective. The Government’s motion does not.

The Government have argued that it makes no military sense to curtail our pilots at an arbitrary border. They correctly point out that we are already engaged in military action. That is in itself a reasonable argument about the efficient use of military resources—I accept that—but the Government cannot also try to argue that by voting against today’s motion, we are voting to do nothing. We are still engaged in Iraq, where the Kurdish peshmerga and the Iraqi army can provide a limited but credible ground force. The Government have also argued—it is a powerful argument—that in the face of a request from our allies, we should respond. Of course we should, but we should not respond by doing just anything. We should respond by doing something that is effective, and what the Government propose is not. I will vote against the motion tonight.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I applaud the fact that you have spent the entirety of this debate in the Chair. I also admire your bladder.

**Mr Speaker:** I am extremely grateful.

##### 6.40 pm

**Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con):** I praise your endurance, Mr Speaker, rather than any part of your anatomy.

I have sat in the Chamber all day listening to this debate and I remember a debate I heard in this place when I was somewhere else. I was sitting in a forward operating base waiting to go to war in 2003. When many people in this place were talking about it, I was preparing for it. I remember vividly the fear in my heart and in those of the men and women with whom I had the honour to serve. I remember the nervousness, and I feel it again here today. Again, we are making a similar decision and I feel that burden heavily, but I know the courage with which the men and women who will be asked to serve will serve and I know that the Prime Minister’s case is right, honourable and true. That is why I am supporting him.

This is an enormously sad moment for me. I grew up as a young journalist in Lebanon, spending my holidays in Syria. I know the country well and I love the people dearly. They gave me a kindness that no one else showed and they gave me warmth and the richness of their culture and history. It has been the most extraordinary sorrow for me to watch the destruction of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama, to see the Christians driven from Maaloula, and to see friends of mine, priests and monks, driven from their monasteries and murdered. I know who is doing it. We know who is doing it. Yes, it is the so-called Islamic State, this twisted perversion of Islam that is to Islam what fascism is to nationalism and what communism is to socialism.

This vile Stalinist death cult, this dreadful regime, must, I am sorry to say, be stopped. Sadly, the only way to stop it is not through talks. These are people and this is a group who do not wish to speak to us. They have defined us clearly in their theology as infidels. They have taken the readings of Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab

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and have interpreted them for the modern age. They have defined us as people who must die or convert. I will do neither; I will fight.

It is not enough for us to look at Syria today and wish for peace. It is not enough for us to stand here and hope for it. We must fight for it. When our friends were attacked, as they were in France—here I declare a close interest as my wife is French—when we see our friends injured and murdered and when they ask for our help, we must think not only of what is the right thing to do for them but of what is the right thing to do for us. Militarily, and for very good reasons, we keep armed forces that are too small. They are too small in technical terms, because our armed forces are not limited to our own planes, our own men and our own ships.

**Simon Hoare:** My hon. Friend is making his point incredibly powerfully, and it will resonate across the House. Does he agree that that is the important reason why we must build an international coalition? No one country can defeat ISIS. We need international western and Muslim resolve against these people.

**Tom Tugendhat:** I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right; our defences do not start at Dover. They include the Emiratis, alongside whom I was proud to serve. They include the Kuwaitis, the Bahrainis, the French and the Estonians. They include so many of our allies. Our defence is their defence and, similarly, their defence is ours. We must stand with the French today; they may need to stand with us tomorrow.

This is not just about bombing, about which people have spoken a lot; it is about territory. Denying territory to the enemy and degrading their capabilities through air attack is an essential part of warfare. I have heard so much about military strategy here from armchair generals. May I say to the academic generals that even academics need universities in which to associate and places in which to meet? So too do terrorists: they need space, land and freedom of movement. That is what they have now and that is what we must deny them.

I say again that it is not enough to wish for peace—we must fight for it. As Ibn Khaldun said when he wrote his histories of the 13th and 14th centuries and “The Muqaddimah”, history does come round, and one day I am sure we will all be pleased to see the middle east regaining its rightful position as the heart of light in the region—as a centre of science, excellence and innovation. But today it is our duty to stand with those who strive for it and fight those who would destroy it. We must stand today against ISIS and with the Government.

##### 6.45 pm

**Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) on a powerful speech. I have reached a different conclusion from him, but he made a powerful case none the less.

May I draw the House’s attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests? I visited Jordan in October, with my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary. The visit was arranged by Oxfam so that we could meet Syrian refugees in the Zaatari camp and living in host communities.

I welcome the Government motion’s renewed commitment

“to providing humanitarian support to Syrian refugees”.

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Members from all parts of this House can be proud of the role played by our country, particularly the Department for International Development, alongside civil society, in the humanitarian effort. I also pay tribute to the countries in the region that have welcomed very large numbers of refugees from Syria, notably Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. It is vital that we maintain our support for those neighbouring countries, but it is also increasingly important that we focus on the needs of people displaced within Syria itself. It is estimated that just in October about 120,000 Syrians fled their homes in Aleppo, Hama and Idlib. Our support for multilateral organisations such as the World Food Programme and UNICEF is therefore crucial. The International Development Committee is looking at the Syrian refugee crisis and we plan to publish our report in early January. We are examining both the challenges in the region and what more our country can do to help refugees.

The people at the Zaatari refugee camp told us that they wanted to return home to Syria but they live in fear of their own Government and their barrel bombs. That is part of the context of today’s debate. As the Prime Minister said, our debate today is not about whether we want to defeat Daesh—we all want that. The evil actions of that organisation are well documented and have been covered during his debate. The question is: how do we do it? Last year, I supported the decision to join airstrikes against Daesh in Iraq. I agree with those on both sides of today’s argument who have said that our airstrikes have played an important role in helping the Iraqi Government forces and the peshmerga to take territory from Daesh in Iraq. But I also agree with those colleagues on both sides of the House who have said that the situation on the ground in Raqqa is very different from the one in Iraq. I do not necessarily question the 70,000 figure. The issue for me is where those troops are. They are Syrian opposition forces who are typically in other parts of Syria and fighting the Assad regime. It is fanciful to suppose that they will provide a ground force for an operation combined with airstrikes in Raqqa. I am not convinced, therefore, that there is a credible ground force for Raqqa.

After the Prime Minister’s statement last Thursday, I went back to Liverpool, where I met a Syrian doctor who lives there. He expressed the view of many Syrians living in exile when he said that for them the biggest threat comes from Assad. Indeed, the moderate forces that we seem to be relying on are currently bombed by Assad and by Russia. I fear that the lack of ground forces will limit the effectiveness of airstrikes and that the strategy the Prime Minister set out last week of ISIL-first—in other words, Daesh-first—will have the unintended consequence of strengthening the brutal and murderous Assad regime. For those reasons, I will vote against the Government tonight.

##### 6.49 pm

**David Warburton (Somerton and Frome) (Con):** One or two Members of this House may not have read the Daesh propaganda sheet, Dabiq, or indeed heard the address in Mosul of their leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, to mark his leadership. He spoke about territory and about establishing his hard-line caliphate in that territory. He described how his organisation will

“trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy and uncover its deviant nature.”

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That perspective is rather important in our debate. Unlike the threat from al-Qaeda, without the occupation of territory, Daesh’s claims to authority are literally baseless. Their notional caliphate has quickly turned from a spiritual aspiration into a geographic reality, and so loosening their grip on that territory is an essential pre-condition of meeting the wider challenge that they pose.

Dabiq consistently emphasises the fact that the existence and the integrity of this territorial caliphate are necessary for Daesh to function. Even the name “Dabiq” refers to the site of a mythical future battle between them and the west. Even in that name, the emphasis is on territory.

From reading the material, it seems that the short and medium-term foreign policy of Daesh, such as it is, has two distinct aims. The first is to consolidate their holdings in the Levant, which already cover an area larger than the UK. The second aim, which is wholly contingent on that, is the spread of Daesh’s contorted version of soft power into western societies where they hope it might calcify into extremism.

The Paris attacks tragically highlighted Balzac’s principle that the cool measured gaze of Paris was an arbiter not only of French values, but of universal human values. Alongside a clear articulation of enlightenment values, the search for a political solution, the humanitarian effort and our commitment to the post-conflict reconstruction, we must also respond militarily. These people are implacably opposed to our way of life in all its aspects. For them, plurality, diversity and individual freedoms indicate weakness rather than strength.

Furthermore, I do not believe that we should abdicate our moral duty to others. It is not only nonsensical, but counterproductive to join with coalition forces in Iraq and to threaten fewer civilians there because of the Brimstone missile system and then not to do so in Daesh-held territory in Syria, where the French, the coalition and the allies are all asking for help.

I see no place for any kind of twisted moral relativism whereby the Daesh threat is seen in some way as a consequence of our own foreign policy. In fact, Daesh can only be defeated as a result of our foreign policy—a policy directed at the very caliphate from which they seek to attack us. I am talking about the territory that they have won, that they celebrate and on which they intend to build their movement.

Of course we all feel the enormous weight of responsibility that is devolved to us today, but our message must continue to be unambiguous that we will not allow terrorists to build a platform from which to attack us, that we will continue to stand up for those universal rights and that we are prepared to meet murderous fanaticism with force.

##### 6.53 pm

**John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP):** Let me begin with where, surely, we all agree. None of us in this House supports Daesh. All of us want to see them defeated. As an atheist, I shiver with horror when I see and read about Christians being beheaded. As a gay man I weep to see homosexuals being thrown from buildings in Syria. So let no one, on either side of the House, impugn the motives of those who speak in this

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debate. However, let us remember recent debates. It is not unkind to remind those who claimed that bombing would bring order to Iraq 12 years ago, and to Syria two years ago, of how wrong they were.

In the debate on the Iraq war, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) said:

“The idea that this action would become a recruiting sergeant for…those who are anti any nation in the west is, I am afraid, nonsense.”—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 774.]

He now sits in the Cabinet and advocates a new bombing campaign against another foe in the middle east, but uses much the same line. This debate puts mostly the same arguments, with the same proponents, as the debate on the Iraq war. I was a journalist at the time, and interviewed all the main political players and the country’s leading experts in chemical warfare, missile accuracy and Sunni-Shi’ite politics. I concluded that, while Saddam was a monster, he was a monster who controlled the monsters. The then Labour Government and Tory Front-Bench team disagreed and removed Saddam, thereby unleashing the forces of medieval hell on Iraq and its neighbours. Eliza Manningham-Buller, director general of MI5 during the invasion, said:

“The bombing increased the terrorist threat by convincing more people in the region that Islam was under attack. It provided an arena for jihad.”

The armchair generals would be chastened, one might think, but two years ago, by then in government, the Conservatives asked the House to bomb the region again. This time, they wanted to bomb another secular despot—President Assad—but wisely, the House refused.

**Alberto Costa:** The hon. Gentleman said that we all want to see the end of Daesh. I invite him to join us in the Lobby to agree the motion. Our position is that airstrikes can destroy Daesh supply lines and, more importantly, the terror training facilities, which are a danger to his constituents in East Dunbartonshire, as they are to South Leicestershire and the whole United Kingdom. Why does he not support that?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Interventions must be brief, not mini-speeches, however eloquent.

**John Nicolson:** If bombing could destroy Daesh, surely the dozen countries that are already bombing it would have succeeded in that aim.

Without a blush, the Government, who 24 months ago wanted to bomb President Assad, now want us to bomb his enemies. As Members, we are offered ever more florid claims by Ministers and their Labour allies. Perhaps the most absurd that we have heard today is that 70,000 fighters, spread across Iraq, consisting of disparate groups and with no central command or shared vision, will march collectively thousands of miles to support a British bombing mission. It is utterly absurd, and that argument has fallen apart during today’s debate.

Let us examine whether UK bombing would make a difference, as the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) contends. I do not think so. Between August 2014 and August this year, 17,000 bombs were dropped on Iraq. Twelve countries are bombing Syria, including Russia, the United States, Canada and France. It is reported that 2,104 civilians have been killed as

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collateral damage in 267 separate bombing incidents in the past year alone. It is a disgrace, and further bombing will not help.

The UN envoy to Syria says that

“all evidence shows that the overwhelming majority of all the civilian victims in the Syrian conflict have been caused so far by the use of aerial weapons.”

Daesh is not a Napoleonic army standing out in the open waiting to be attacked. It wants to draw us into the conflict. It hides in civilian areas, and it uses human shields. It relies on our folly, our arrogance and our lack of cultural understanding. Dr Shuja Shafi of the Muslim Council of Britain says:

“As more innocent people die from air strikes, the appeal of Daesh will strengthen. Daesh craves more Western military intervention in the region. We urge MPs to learn lessons from the past, and not to vote for extending”

bombing. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past. We will kill numerous civilians. We will radicalise the bereaved survivors. We have no credible peace plan in place. We are being fed ludicrous statistics, and on a wing and a prayer we are hoping for better luck this time.

##### 6.59 pm

**Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con):** I am grateful, Mr Speaker, to be called in this important debate.

We have heard many speeches from both sides which have shown considerable passion and a surprising degree of knowledge and commitment. This has been one of the best debates that I have had the privilege to participate in. If we are to look at the question cleanly and lucidly, we have to try to remove the impassioned speeches. As others have mentioned, everyone in the House is equally appalled by the barbarous crimes of ISIL or Daesh. We are united in that. No one can claim the moral high ground by being more against ISIL or Daesh than anyone else. What we have to do as legislators is look at the premise of the argument and at what the Government are trying to do.

The Government, in a way that is historically and constitutionally not usual, are asking the House of Commons to extend a campaign for which the House voted overwhelmingly in a previous Parliament only 18 months ago. The vote was something like 524 to 43. This gave the Prime Minister and the Government authority to launch attacks on Daesh in Iraq. For the life of me I have not been able to understand why those people who in the last Parliament voted for intervention in Iraq draw the line, so to speak, in Syria.

Those borders, as everyone knows, are incredibly artificial. After 1918, they moved around two or three times. The Sykes-Picot agreement that people go on about did not define Iraq and Syria. It simply defined regions within those countries, which were under British and French rule in the form of a mandate.

**Ian Blackford:** I ask the hon. Gentleman to understand some of the problems for those of us who oppose the motion. We all want to see peace and stability. All of us in the House agree on that, but the difficulty we have is that we cannot see that the air campaign in itself will defeat Daesh. We now know that the 70,000 troops do not exist. How are we going to defeat Daesh? It is not clear.

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**Kwasi Kwarteng:** The hon. Gentleman is right. I am pleased to see him in his place. He was not in the last Parliament, where we had an extensive debate about intervention. No one ever believed that an air campaign on its own would defeat and destroy that terrorist organisation. That was never the case that was made. I hear people say that an air attack is no good because Daesh will survive it, but that is not what anyone has suggested. It is part of a suite of things we can do to fight against this evil terrorist organisation.

**Mr Anderson** *rose—*

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** I have given way once; I shall make progress.

I hear Members opposed to the Government’s motion saying, “Why don’t we challenge Daesh on the internet?” I hear colleagues today ask why we do not try to attack the ideology. We can do all these things. None of them militates against the other; it is not a question of either/or. These actions are part of a range of responses that we need to deploy against something that we have never seen in the modern world.

When people look at what the Government are trying to do, it is no good talking about the 2003 invasion of Iraq. That was a completely different set of circumstances. It involved the commitment of British ground troops in a transnational coalition. What the Government are asking for today is an extension of what has already happened. People cannot, on the one hand, say that it will be the most devastating thing in the world if we bomb ISIS targets, and on the other hand say, “It wouldn’t do very much so what’s the point?” It is one thing or the other, but people on the other side of the argument have said both. They have said that airstrikes are so insignificant that we should not bother, and they have said that they will devastate and bomb Syria into oblivion. Both of those statements cannot be true.

It has never been part of the Government’s case that a bombing campaign in itself would destroy ISIS. Three things have happened: the Sharm el-Sheikh outrage, the Tunisian outrage and the particularly savage attacks in Paris. These have completely shifted the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and it is entirely justified for the Government to extend the provision to attack Syria, as they have done in Iraq.

##### 7.4 pm

**Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP):** I will not dwell on any sense of resentment that the Social Democratic and Labour party might have about the Prime Minister’s line about terrorist sympathisers, but I will say that I think it was unworthy and that it warranted an apology in this debate. However, today is not about any personal offence that Members of this House might feel; it is about the real fears and threats and the dire suffering faced by people in Syria and the concern that so many hon. Members have expressed for the safety and security of our constituents.

People in Syria, as we know, are caught between the barrel bombs of Assad and the barbarism of Daesh, and they struggle to reach the barbed wire now going up in Europe. Yes, their plight demands a comprehensive strategy and compels a much stronger response from this Government and others across Europe. The Prime Minister has told us that he is offering a comprehensive strategy. He told us in his opening statement today that

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he has listened to many of the considerations and concerns raised by hon. Members, and in effect he has collated them and co-opted them in the rolling references we now see in the motion, which is presented as a comprehensive strategy. I do not believe that it is coherent or complete. It do not believe that it is convincing in the collateral considerations and claims that are or are not addressed. I do not believe that it is cohesive in how its different dimensions meet and join.

Like the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), I think that it is right that we test the logic of what we are hearing on both sides of the debate. I am not among those who, in arguing against the motion, claim that airstrikes will increase the risk of a terrorist attack in any constituency in the near term; I do not think that it makes a difference one way or another to a threat that is real and live. However, I think that there is a severe risk of feeding what we are trying to fight—of feeding a wider agenda of radicalisation—by agreeing to airstrikes and so adopting the role that the jihadism playbook craves us to adopt.

We are told that we should agree to airstrikes in Syria because they are merely an extension of what is already happening. The people who tell us that are the same people who tell us that there is no danger of mission creep in what the Government propose, yet there has already been an absolute mission flip. Only two years ago the idea was to go in and airstrike against Assad, and now it is to go in and airstrike against the very people we would have been assisting had we conducted airstrikes two years ago.

**Mr Burrowes:** What feeds the terrorists’ agenda is territory, and the more territory they gain, the bigger their so-called caliphate becomes and the greater their ability to recruit other jihadists, including from this country. The fact that we have been able to reduce that territory—we have regained 30%—has degraded their ability to radicalise other jihadists.

**Mark Durkan:** But let us remember that their concept of the caliphate is not merely geographical; it is an altogether different concept.

There is a danger of western powers piling in because we think that what is proposed is merely an extension of what we are already doing. It has been argued that we should not recognise the border between Iraq and Syria because ISIL does not recognise it, so is ISIL to dictate the terms by which judgments are made? We should not be taking our standards from Daesh.

It has also been argued that we have to take such action to stand by our allies. Does that mean that this House will have to agree to the next thing our allies do? What about ground troops, for instance? Many hon. Members who support airstrikes have been very clear that they would not agree to the deployment of ground forces. Indeed, we are told that one of the merits of the motion is that it contains no commitment to ground forces. What if people say that that is what is required? What if the operational circumstances and exigencies of the conflict are such that ground forces are required, because the 70,000 Free Syrian Army people are not there? They cannot be provided by CGI. What if everybody agrees that ground forces are needed to achieve what the Government want in Raqqa?

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What happens when Assad decides that he is moving into Raqqa, supported by Russia? We will then have a conflict within the alliance itself, because what the Government propose is on the basis of a shifting alliance with some very shifty allies, including some who have been the syndicators of terrorism, powers and personages within the Gulf states. Members should question what Turkey has been doing in relation to oil and arms and Daesh; question what Saudi Arabia has been doing, and they are our allies. When the Government’s mission changes, where will we go? We will have mission creep.

##### 7.10 pm

**Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con):** Although I share the Government’s objectives, I am afraid I have strong and deeply held reservations about supporting an extension of the bombing campaign without a longer-term strategy. Indeed, my concerns were admirably summed up by the Chairman of the Defence Committee—my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis)—and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie). I am not opposed to a bombing campaign per se, but as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has himself acknowledged—and across the House there seems to be total agreement—a bombing campaign alone cannot succeed; it can only be a prelude to a ground campaign.

The motion before us specifically excludes UK ground forces, and so we are to fall back on the 70,000 members of the Free Syrian Army. Whether this figure is accurate, I do not know, but I am very prepared to accept the Government’s acknowledgement that it is. However, it is a disparate group, and so we are asked to believe that this disparate group is capable of bringing order out of chaos. Maintaining order in a war-torn country with so many different factions is a massive challenge, as we have seen elsewhere. So we have a vacuum, and as we know, vacuums will always be filled.

**Imran Hussain:** On top of the points that have already been made and that the hon. Gentleman makes, does he agree that those 70,000 opposition forces are in the south-west of Syria while Daesh is in the north-east, so there are logistical issues as well?

**Martin Vickers:** I have no direct evidence of what the hon. Gentleman says, but I am very prepared to accept that that may well be the case.

As I say, vacuums will always be filled. How are we to assume that the Free Syrian Army will respect human rights and maintain law and order until a legitimate new regime acceptable to a majority of the Syrian people emerges? How, indeed, would we assess whether a new regime was acceptable to the Syrian people? Who will install this new regime? I want to be convinced of a way forward, but sadly I am not yet convinced of this one.

We want to help and support our French neighbours because, unlike the suffering that we often see on our TV screens in, say, Gaza, Yemen or Mali, which tend to be distant places, we can readily identify with them. They have a Christian heritage and the eternal values associated with that. Many of us have perhaps even been to the same Parisian cafés and walked along the same streets, which are only a short train journey away from here. In fact, they are a shorter journey away than from here to my constituency, and to many others. We desperately want to help, as we wanted to help our

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American allies, quite rightly, when we were shown TV pictures of beheadings, crucifixions and the like, and other unspeakable crimes. Now we see exactly the same pictures from a different location supposedly carried out by a different group, and again, of course, we want to go and help. But sometimes helping our friends and allies can mean putting a hand on their shoulder and saying, “Perhaps this is not the time to be doing what you are doing.” Of course, that was the case with our French allies at the time of the 2003 Iraq situation, when President Bush and Mr Blair were planning their particular adventure in the middle east.

I want to support the Government’s aims and objectives, but I feel that a longer-term strategy has not yet been sufficiently put forward. My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) said that if we are undecided we should perhaps fall back on our instincts. My instinct is to say to the Government, “Hold back at this stage.” ISIL/Daesh is an evil force that must be overcome, but I am not yet convinced that what is being proposed is the way to achieve that.

##### 7.14 pm

**Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), although I disagree with the position he takes. I pay tribute to the hon. and gallant Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) and the hon. and gallant Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) for their thoughtful speeches, and also to my right hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) and for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), with whom I agree entirely.

This is one of the most important decisions an MP can make, and it is not one I have taken lightly. As a Labour MP, I believe we have to choose and shape Britain’s place in the world if we are to create a world in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few. ISIL poses a clear threat to Britain. Thirty British holidaymakers were murdered on the beach in Tunisia in July, and we know that seven ISIL-related terror attacks against British people have been stopped in the past year. Paris could have happened in London.

There is no hope of negotiating with ISIL. We must stop the flow of fighters, finance and arms to its headquarters in Raqqa. We need military action to stop it murdering Syrians and Iraqis, and to disrupt its propaganda machine, which poisons the minds of our young people and leads them to commit appalling acts at home and abroad. For the past 14 months, UK forces have carried out airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq, with no civilian casualties, so for me it makes no sense to turn back our planes at the Syrian border and allow ISIL to regroup in Syria.

In September, as Labour’s shadow International Development Secretary, I visited Lebanon, where 1.5 million Syrian refugees have sought sanctuary. One in four people in Lebanon is a Syrian refugee. The Department for International Development has made a huge contribution to the aid effort there, opening up Lebanese schools to Syrian children so that they can continue

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their education and have some form of normality after witnessing the horrors of that war.

I met Iman, a 65-year-old grandmother from Aleppo, who was imprisoned by President Assad for two weeks when she bravely returned from Lebanon to Syria, after her son was killed, to rescue her five orphaned grandchildren. She lives in a shack made of breeze blocks in the port city of Sidon. Hadia told me how her husband, a Red Cross volunteer, was killed in Syria, and how her four older children are still trapped in Homs. She did not want to go to Germany under a resettlement programme, because she could not take her elderly mother with her and did not want to leave her alone to die in a camp. I met Ahmed from Raqqa and 10-year-old girls working in the fields as agricultural labourers—their childhoods stolen from them—after ISIL had taken over their town, although that is still better than staying in Raqqa and being enslaved there.

There is a massive humanitarian crisis in Syria: 250,000 people have been killed, there are 4.7 million refugees outside the country and 6 million have been internally displaced.

**George Kerevan:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mary Creagh:** I will not. I want other Members to have the chance to speak, as we have all been waiting to do.

The UK has given aid to Jordan and Syria, but aid is not the answer to the problems of Syria. Peace is the answer, and we need a fresh diplomatic effort to bring peace to that country. The Vienna talks offer real hope of that, with Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran all around the table for the first time.

We voted against action in 2013, after the sarin gas attacks—a vote I regret and now believe to be wrong. We now have the largest refugee crisis since world war two. The war in Syria has no end and no laws, and ISIL is expanding its caliphate there. We have had no strategy for Syria, and now we have no easy choices. We need a ceasefire, a political settlement and a path to democratic elections, which is why I shall support the Government tonight.

##### 7.18 pm

**Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con):** May I pay tribute to you, Mr Speaker, for your incredible stamina this afternoon, which I have been unable to match?

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) for her impassioned speech. Like her, I have recently visited refugee camps. A few weeks ago, I was in Gaziantep, talking to refugees in a camp near the border between Turkey and Syria. There were rows of containers converted into two-room dwellings, a school and a clinic. It was basic, but sufficient. Without exception, however, every refugee I spoke to was desperate to leave, desperate for an end to the chaos and desperate for their children to grow up to live a decent life. There are millions of people who share that plea in countries around Syria and within it, and who want us to help bring about peace in Syria.

Compelling though that may sound, it is not a case for war. The justification for airstrikes in Syria is, first and foremost, that Daesh is a threat to our national security. It and its affiliates have targeted British people

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on holiday in Tunisia; through social media, where they incite young people to leave their homes and fight in Syria; and here in the UK, although their plots have been foiled so far.

As other Members have said, targeting Daesh in Iraq but stopping at the border does not make sense. If we are serious about reducing its ability to attack us, we have to degrade its capabilities in its heartland in Syria.

Secondly, we should stand by our allies. If we do not stand with France after the Paris attack, when will we? What confidence can our allies in the middle east have in us if we sit on our hands now? For months, they have called for us to play a leading role in the coalition against Daesh. We cannot ignore that call any longer. We have to restore their faith in us as an ally.

Of course there are concerns, and we in this House are right to raise them. Is this another Iraq? My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) spoke sagely on that point. I am reassured that we have learned the lessons, but we should be carefully that the mistakes of the past do not mar our judgment in the present.

Airstrikes will degrade Daesh but not defeat it, so what will happen next? Some boots on the ground will be needed and one group of terrorists must not be replaced by another. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) said, we may search in vain for certainty. One thing that I believe for certain is that the coalition, with Britain as part of it, must commit to seeing this through.

**Ian Blackford:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Hon. Members:** No.

**Helen Whately:** My colleagues are keen to speak, so I will press on. I am sorry.

This action needs to be part of a serious and long-term commitment, not only to Syria, but to the region. We must use our influence to promote stability and legitimate Governments there, for there are many fragile states in the middle east. As I heard time and again on my recent visit to the region, stability in almost any form is better than chaos. We will need to be pragmatic, because democracies take generations to develop.

This action is just one part of the battle we need to wage against Daesh and Islamic extremism. It is a battle that we must wage culturally, ideologically, economically and militarily. It is the battle of our generation and it is imperative that we win it.

**Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con):** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Helen Whately:** I am just wrapping up.

We must commit. For that reason, I will support the motion tonight.

##### 7.22 pm

**Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab):** I begin by paying tribute to the RAF and its men and women, many of whom will have done their training in my constituency. They are part of my community. Many of those who are posted to RAF Valley stay in the community. They are a source of advice to me. They are measured and do

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not always, as the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) said, think as one. They think as individuals and I have listened to what many of them have had to say over the past few weeks.

I listened also to the Prime Minister last Thursday and agreed with a lot of what he said. However, I do not think that he had a coherent plan for the action that he is asking us to take tonight. I believe that it is flawed on the grounds that we do not have sufficient ground forces. I did not come to that decision lightly. I listened when we debated taking action in Iraq and I supported it then because the Prime Minister convinced us that the very reason we were taking that action was that there were solid troops on the ground and a solid Government. We do not have those things in Syria. Those who say that it is just the same and there is an artificial boundary should listen to what the Prime Minister has said.

I will quote the Prime Minister, but unlike you, Mr Speaker, when you were on these Benches, I have to read the column because I do not have your memory. In column 1257 on 26 September 2014, in an answer to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), who suggested that airstrikes without ground forces would be just gesture politics, the Prime Minister said:

“To be absolutely direct, I am not claiming that by air strikes alone we can roll back this problem. What this problem requires is a comprehensive strategy, including a well formed Iraqi Government and well formed Iraqi armed forces, because they in the end will be the ones who have to defeat this on the ground.”—[*Official Report*, 26 September 2014; Vol. 585, c. 1257.]

The lack of that in Syria makes it unfortunate and wrong for us to proceed with the proposed action, and for that reason I will not support the Government motion. I believe in consistency, and the Prime Minister is not being consistent, given his arguments at that time and what he is saying today. External factors have changed, but practical ability on the ground has not.

Let me ask the Foreign Secretary a direct question. I intervened on the Prime Minister early in the debate, but I believe that the Foreign Secretary can answer this question directly. My constituent’s son was killed in an accident as a trainee pilot in 2012. His father has asked me to ask the Government whether all the Tornadoes and Typhoons now in Iraq will have a collision warning system. When we are sending people to war, it is important that they have the correct kit, and we have argued for that for years.

I wanted to hear the Prime Minister come up with something today—perhaps a move towards a UN resolution that includes chapter 7 status. That does not exist today, and I therefore do not think that there is a comprehensive strategy. I voted for action in Libya, and I am certainly not a pacifist. I did not vote on Iraq because I did not think the case was made, but my colleague, Peter Kilfoyle, tabled that motion, and he is no woolly liberal.

##### 7.26 pm

**Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con):** In his response to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition quoted part of an email from Abdulaziz Almashi. I would like to go on and read some of the rest of it:

“We have driven ISIS out of our towns before, but it is becoming impossible to do so while we are facing the relentless bombardment of the Assad regime and Russia. The territory that

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ISIS controls is crucial to their growth, their capture of resources, and their ability to conduct terror attacks abroad. We need help in order to keep them out of our town.

The Syrian regime has killed 7 times more civilians than Isis this year. No, it is not as Julian Lewis says, that Assad is the lesser of two evils. Assad and Russian airstrikes have been focused on our hospitals and schools and homes, and much less so on Isis assets. As their bombardments continue, our towns are weakened. Isis comes in to fill the void, and amidst economic collapse, provides services and the promise of steady salaries, beefing up their recruitment and their hold on the land.

Make no mistake, however, Syrians are resisting. Just last week in my own hometown of Manbij, women were kidnapped, an activist was tortured to death, and protesters were shot for trying to keep Isis out.

These people deserve your support—and supporting them is the only way to defeat Isis.”

I was not present in the Parliament that refused to take action against Assad and his regime, but as Edmund Burke said, the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to walk by. This has not been easy, but my decision to support the motion is based on a clear plan that was agreed in the Vienna process, support from the UN to tackle the barbaric operations of Daesh, and the commitment of the United Kingdom to action that is focused on diplomatic, humanitarian, military and national security issues. I have read every email from my constituents on this matter. I agree wholeheartedly with the speeches made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett).

I have asked myself this question: if an attack masterminded from Raqqa happened in Chester and my constituents were caught up in it and I had voted no to further intervention in Syria, would I have acted in their best interests, or indeed in the interests of the civilian populations under the devastating rule of Daesh? I believe the answer to that question is no. I will be voting with the Government tonight.

##### 7.30 pm

**Mr Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab):** As has been said on many occasions during the debate, everybody agrees Daesh is a threat to us all, to our way of life and to our liberties, and that it has to be destroyed. However, I am not convinced that dropping more bombs on Syria will add anything to the defeat of this organisation. There are already a lot of bombs being dropped by Russia, America and France. Apart from not destroying Daesh, they are creating terror among the population, resulting in the mass displacement of the Syrian population. This, in turn, is causing huge problems for European Governments who are trying to cope with the flood of refugees.

We in this country should of course support France. We should provide that support and solidarity in various other ways. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) outlined some of them. Other Members have outlined other ways in which we can assist. We should provide logistical, intelligence and special forces support to the Kurds and the elements of the Free Syrian Army who are actually doing the fighting on the ground. It is only ground forces—Arab ground forces—who will eventually bring about the displacement and defeat of Daesh in Syria.

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The Prime Minister has said that there are 70,000 Syrians ready to fight. I take him at his word and we shall have to see. I suspect, however, that this assertion will come back to haunt him in the same way that the assertion made at the very same Dispatch Box, that the UK was only 45 minutes away from a nuclear or chemical attack by Saddam Hussein, has continued to shred the legacy of a former Prime Minister.

We can also share with the French and our allies our expertise in monitoring and breaking up terrorist cells, because we have long experience of doing that in the UK. Furthermore, we should go to the UN and seek support for safe havens to be created within Syria. This would be in our interests and in the interests of other European countries. It would also be humanitarian in helping not to force the population out of Syria.

There has been one voice, among the many that have been raised today, that has not been heard: a voice from somebody who has experienced Daesh and been a hostage of that organisation. I refer to the French journalist, Nicolas Henin. In a recent article he wrote:

“I know for sure that our pain, our grief, our hopes, our lives do not touch them. Theirs is a world apart…Central to their world view is the belief that communities cannot live together with Muslims”.

But he went on to say:

“They came to Paris with Kalashnikovs, claiming that they wanted to stop the bombing, but knowing all too well that the attack would force us to keep bombing or even to intensify these counterproductive attacks.”

He ended by saying:

“I know them: bombing they expect. What they fear is unity.”

We must have unity of purpose in speaking out and destroying Daesh. The Prime Minister will have his majority tonight and he will win the vote, but I do not believe he has won the argument.

##### 7.34 pm

**Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con):** I first pay tribute to the brave pilots and crew of the RAF who are already flying in operations over Iraq. As always, they do our nation proud, and we are indebted to them.

Let me start by quoting from the great man himself, Winston Churchill:

“Never, never, never believe that any war will be smooth and easy or that anyone who embarks on a strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realise that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.”

That is a cautionary observation and one that runs through all the speeches I have heard tonight. The Government’s laudable aim is to safeguard the peoples of this great nation, to stand with our allies and to degrade Daesh. Members should please note that I did not say “destroy” Daesh, as bombing alone will not achieve that aim. What, then, does success look like? The only way Daesh can be truly destroyed in Iraq and Syria is by a large-scale multinational ground offensive, for which there is no appetite for a multitude of reasons—not least the ghosts of the past, which clearly stalk this Chamber tonight. But if we truly intend to tackle this problem, destroy Daesh in its lair and follow through on UN resolution 2249, a ground offensive is the only practical and logical conclusion.

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Bombing will degrade Daesh, kill its operatives and give heart to those fighting this organisation on the ground, but it will not destroy it. The Government have made it clear that they have no wish to put boots on the ground, which today’s motion specifically excludes. I suspect, however, that that is exactly where it might lead, as one consequence of a bombing campaign. We are a major player and must play a prominent role, standing up for values that are envied across the globe.

Islamic fundamentalism is, regrettably, our generation’s scourge, and it is not going to dissipate in the short term. Could this be our Thirty Years war? The current threat is real and present: it can and must be fought. So let us not discard the idea of boots on the ground—no matter whose boots they are—but explore that option in the eventuality. As Churchill indicated, conflict subjects us to forces outside our control. Subsequently, every eventuality needs to be examined.

Bombing alone will not solve this vexed question, which has divided the House and will do so again later, but it will demonstrate to the world that we will defend our island and her people, stand by our allies and meet our international obligations. As I said here on Monday night, evil thrives when good men and women do nothing. Tonight, I shall go into the Lobby with the Government. I am with the Government, our allies and the thousands of innocent victims who are looking to us for help.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry to say it, but a three-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now have to apply.

##### 7.37 pm

**Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP):** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the huge advance notice of that.

Despite many of the good and measured speeches we have heard today, the drums of war are still beating in the background. I know that that does not always make for good, rational decision making. We do not disagree that Daesh is a wicked and evil group, who must be defeated. I am not a pacifist, and I do not doubt that military power may play a part in the defeat of Daesh at some point, but I am utterly unconvinced by the case the Prime Minister has made here today.

Those speaking in favour of this motion seem to be deploying three main arguments for the necessity of British action in Syria. The first is that we should do so to help our allies; the second is that the UK has special capabilities vital to the completion of coalition aims; and the third is that doing so will make us safer at home. Such arguments may be seductive, but I caution the Government to ask themselves whether this bombing campaign will bring us any closer to a solution or stability in the region.

The most emotive argument is the one about helping our allies, particularly France, which had to endure horrific attacks that struck at the heart of its capital city just over a fortnight ago. I followed Scotland’s First

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Minister––and I was the first MP to sign––in signing the book of condolence in the French consulate in Edinburgh, so I and my SNP colleagues beside me here take our duties to France, and indeed our other NATO partners, extremely seriously. Our determination to go after the financiers, the planners and the enablers of that terrible attack will never cease; it just so happens that I think bombing Syria will not bring justice any closer.

The Prime Minister has, I believe, made a terrible mistake in forcing the issue through the House despite the extreme unease of many people, in this place and outside, about the efficacy of airstrikes. Why has he not focused instead on the many other ways in which the United Kingdom could help Syria militarily? UK bases in Cyprus have already been offered, UK logistics and support forces are in the area, and intelligence-sharing has increased. At a time when it is widely accepted that the UK has lost its strategic edge, the Prime Minister’s attempt to make up for that is to say, “There is a fight somewhere; why is Britain not in it?” There is so much more that we could do to help our allies. Churchill once said that jaw-jaw was better than war-war. I think that we need to reinvent that tonight, and say that jaw-jaw is not bomb-bomb. Let me end by saying that my party will support the amendment tabled by the Scottish National party.

##### 7.40 pm

**James Heappey (Wells) (Con):** On three occasions, I left my family and boarded a plane bound for Afghanistan or Iraq. As the plane went through the clouds, I took what could have been my final look out of the window at this country. When you do that, you cannot help wondering whether the people who have stood in this place have made the right decision, whether the nation is with you, and whether what you are going to do is worthwhile.

Today, I rise to contribute to that decision-making process, and I can tell the House that the responsibility weighs heavily on my shoulders. However, I am certain that the motion should be supported. It clearly states that the continuation of airstrikes in Syria is just one part of the solution that is required to defeat Daesh, and to secure a peace both there and in Iraq. Bombing, diplomacy, aid, and countering radicalisation at home and abroad are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, we have surely seen that they are utterly interdependent. Today, we must decide on whether to take military action, and I want to speak briefly about four themes in support of that action.

First, we are being asked to join a coalition—a coalition of our closest allies and some of our most important partners in the region—and we must answer their call. Secondly, our contribution does enhance the capability of the coalition. Difficult targets present themselves only fleetingly, and prosecuting those targets requires constant air cover involving highly skilled pilots and deadly accurate munitions. Our Royal Air Force offers that. Thirdly, there is the necessity for indigenous ground manoeuvre. In Basra, my battle group was fighting an insurgency that existed almost entirely because we were there. The 70,000 Syrians and 20,000 Kurds under arms could, and should, become a cohesive and capable force, but the bombing campaign will buy the time for

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them to be manoeuvred into the place where we need them to be, so that we can co-ordinate their efforts in support of the airstrikes.

It is, of course, important to note that those airstrikes degrade Daesh in the meantime. They have a military effect of their own. It is clear to me from today’s debate—this is my final point—that the House agrees on the ends that we seek to achieve, and that most of us agree on the means by which we seek to achieve them, diplomatic, humanitarian and military. The disagreement is on when, and in what order. I say from personal experience that when we are trying to buy time in a combat zone, we need to suppress the enemy. We need to keep their head down, and deny them any freedom of action. Nothing in a combat zone is perfect—the timing is never right—but we must get on with this, because we are required to do to help the Syrian people.

##### 7.43 pm

**Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab):** I think that I speak for the whole House, Mr Speaker, in expressing my admiration for you today.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Members for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson). I agree with what they said. We come to this House to choose. Yes, we come here to criticise and, at times, to express our anger, but we do not come here to commentate. The purpose of our debate is not entertainment, but education: the education that we need in order to choose. The choice that we must make today is not, as some have implied, on a grand new strategy. It is a relatively narrow choice between a motion that extends our involvement in our existing battle and a vote for the status quo.

**Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab):** Does not this choice involve risk? The risk involved in doing something has to be balanced against the risk involved in doing nothing, which equally carries great risk for this country and for the world.

**Alison McGovern:** I could not have put that better myself.

I have to confess that, not for the first time, I am angry with the Government. I am angry because I believe that they have turned their backs on vulnerable refugees from the conflict in Syria, to whom we should have held out our hands. The process that will take in 20,000 refugees by 2020 is too slow. The Government could have demonstrated to the world what it means to be British, but they have not done enough. I know we must put party politics to one side, but that is hard when the Prime Minister tells us we must do our bit and then does his part too late.

What relevance does this have to the choice in front of us today? The answer is trust and commitment. If I vote for airstrikes today, I need to be able to believe that the Prime Minister will stand beside those in the world who will need him tomorrow. Part of the justification for the strikes is to show our commitment to the coalition against Daesh and show that we are truly part of the fight, but if the Prime Minister wants my support, he will have to show his commitment to the bigger fight ahead of us.

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The biggest recruiting sergeant for vile extremism is want. It is the dissatisfaction with the chances the world is offering, whether in the back streets of Britain or the cities of Africa and the middle east, where young people find that the powerful in our world forget them far too quickly. It is this pervasive want that creates fertile ground for the blame and resentment that extremists cultivate.

We are right to be sceptical of our own capacities, but we should not be sceptical about the Syrian people. Rather, we should offer them refuge now, and our backing tomorrow. Whatever choice we make tonight, we will have to live with it. I will have to face my constituents and explain my decision to them, but that is absolutely nothing compared with what the Syrian people have faced. Too often in the past five years, we have we seen people in need and we have turned away. We must not do that now.

I might not trust the Prime Minister that much, but in the end the solution to that mistrust is in my hands. I want him to know that, if I vote for his motion today, I will be here every week holding him to account. We have Back-Bench motions now, and if I do not believe that he has lived up to the trust of the British people, I will waste not a moment before using them. Any support I give to him is conditional, and we will return to this question again and again. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) said so well, if our job is to work for peace, we will do it with scrutiny. We will scrutinise the Vienna process to make sure that it happens.

We are voting today on just one tactic in this greater struggle, and I see the limits in the choice in front of us. My party, the Labour party, has a bigger task, and it is one that I will never just leave to the Prime Minister. The end to the extremism that we face today will come with a decent and fair society, and we must not waste a moment in fighting for that.

##### 7.48 pm

**Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con):** The first duty of a Government is to protect their citizens and their country, and the decision on whether to use military force is one of the toughest and most significant that a Government, and we as individual MPs, have to take. That is especially so for me, as a new Member of this place. Much of what I have to say has already been said, with far greater eloquence, by hon. Friends and other Members. However, this is a serious matter, and one that my constituents take an interest in, too.

In recent months and weeks, we have been watching an already fragile and serious situation in Syria further unfold and deteriorate. We have heard statements here in the Chamber and listened to debates, and we have rightly been able to ask questions. We all agree that we are appalled by the crimes that ISIL commits daily against Syrian civilians, and we cannot fail to be deeply moved by the plight of the millions of Syrian refugees forced to flee their homes for safety, and of the many more who are displaced in their own country.

The events in Paris have brought the seriousness of the situation even closer to home. As we have heard and as we see, this is a complex situation needing a complex and comprehensive response. The UK, through DFID, is already providing humanitarian aid to the region.

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Like others in this place, I have visited a Syrian refugee camp—on the border of Turkey—albeit two years ago, and I saw for myself the work being done there.

A political solution is also required, and I welcome news that this process is beginning with the Vienna talks. Working towards transitional government will be a key step towards long-term peace and reconciliation and establishing democracy, but there comes a point when humanitarian, political and diplomatic responses alone are no longer enough. As the direct threat posed by ISIL to the UK increases, so too does our responsibility to protect our country and our citizens. ISIL is extreme and must be isolated. We need military action, not inaction.

What message would it send if, as the Prime Minister said, we subcontracted our responsibilities out to others? It is time to stand with our allies. It is not logical for our planes to have to stop at the Iraqi border with Syria. ISIL does not recognise the border; it does not stop there. Its headquarters are not in Iraq; they are in Raqqa. Our RAF is already in the region, operating precision airstrikes. I believe British action can and will make a difference, and I will therefore support the Government this evening.

##### 7.51 pm

**Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton). She is right that this is a serious debate. It is one I have considered, too, and I am sorry, but I have come to a different conclusion from her.

I speak against this motion, and I speak with a great sense of frustration. I am frustrated because I agree with the Prime Minister that we are at war; we are under attack, and we face an enemy the like of which we have never faced before. We are fighting against shadowy networks and nebulous states. Today’s debate is about the theatre of Syria, but we all know there are other theatres. We know there is conflict that we may need to come to in Yemen, on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, in the Khorasan region, in Libya and in parts of Nigeria. The enemy we are debating tonight is Daesh, but we all know there are other enemies. We know there is the core of al-Qaeda still present somewhere around Afghanistan and Pakistan. We know there is al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. We know there is the Khorasan group at work against us. We know there is Jabhat al-Nusra in Iraq, and its allies.

What this reveals to us is that this will be a long march. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr Godsiff) said, we must maintain solidarity and unity of purpose at home for what will be a very long fight. That is why we cannot afford in this House to put forward strategies that we think carry too great a risk of failure, as I am afraid the Government strategy does.

I was grateful to hear the Prime Minister put such emphasis on this being a joint struggle for both western and Islamic freedom. We can see that in the refugee camps of northern Iraq. We know that Daesh has acquired the capability to plan attacks here in Europe. That is why what I wanted today was sustained, short-term action to take out that external planning capability of

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ISIS, whether that needs air cover or boots on the ground. In the longer term, like the Chair of the Defence Committee, I want to see an overwhelming coalition brought to bear, to smash Daesh into history. That needs Vienna first, not Vienna second.

We dare not risk defeat. That would hand our enemies a propaganda victory that we would hear about for years to come. However, victory means bringing together air cover, ground forces and politics—and, heavens above, if we cannot sustain that combination to take back Mosul, how on earth will we take back Raqqa in Syria? That is why I was disappointed that the Prime Minister was not able to specify this afternoon just what the ground forces are that will help us take back Raqqa under the air cover of the RAF. That is the difference between Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, there are ground forces; in Syria, frankly, there are not. I do not want a half-hearted fight; I want a full-on fight, and we did not have a plan for that from the Government today.

##### 7.54 pm

**Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con):** I have considered this matter very carefully. I respect the views of other Members, including the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), and, indeed, the views of my constituents, whatever side of the debate they find themselves on. Having listened to the arguments, I rise to support the motion. It is absolutely imperative that Britain and her allies work together to eliminate the so-called Islamic State: a group whose continued existence is an affront to humanity; a group responsible for unparalleled brutality over recent years; a group that loathes freedom and democracy, and despises every value we hold dear.

At around the turn of the fifth century, St Augustine laid out his preconditions for a just war, among which were a desire for peace, and for it to be the final decision when all other means had failed. I believe that his words remain pertinent in the 21st century, as negotiating with the so-called Islamic State would be both impossible and abhorrent.

I am glad that the motion proposes to target the so-called Islamic State exclusively, for it is that group of terrorists who have attacked us and who pose a danger to our people. They hate us for who we are, not what we do. They must be stopped.

Although we may not approve of the actions undertaken by the Assad regime, our overwhelming priority must be to protect the United Kingdom and support our allies. To do that, we must stabilise Syria, avoiding the creation of further ungoverned spaces in which terrorism will thrive.

Had the motion mandated a complete overthrow of the Syrian regime by force, leading to the destruction of the apparatus of government, I would not in all conscience have been able to support it, for we would not have learned the lessons from past conflicts; we would not have been helping to stabilise Syria; and we would not have been making Britain safer. Under the motion, however, I believe we have, we are and we will.

##### 7.56 pm

**Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind):** I admire your fortitude, Mr Speaker, in sitting in the Chair for so long. I am very pleased to be able to speak, because I

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visited Rojava in north-eastern Syria for eight days in October, to speak to the commanders of the YPJ and the YPG, who are fighting Daesh directly on the frontline, and to the leaders of democratic non-confederalism about the democratic revolution happening in that part of the world.

The Kurds I met were very clear that they were working to protect areas and to retake areas taken by Daesh, such as Kobane. They are limiting their actions to those areas inhabited by the Kurdish population. They are not expansionist. If they are to be considered as part of the alleged 70,000 moderate ground forces put forward by the Government, their geographic limitation must give us all pause for thought. They told me that, in the first instance, they want a democratic solution to the ongoing civil war. Daesh exists and thrives in the vacuum and chaos of the uprising, and the continued instability of Syria lies in a fractured, multifaceted, multi-layered and multi-factioned response to Assad’s brutality and suppression.

**Dr Lisa Cameron:** Does the hon. Lady share my concerns that the allies involved appear to have conflicting goals and outcomes that they wish to achieve in Syria, and that we would simply be adding to the chaos and destruction of Syria?

**Natalie McGarry:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. I will come to it later; I completely agree with her. Syria will continue to be unstable until the world realises that the only solution is democracy. When will the UK understand that “shoot first, repent later” is the wrong strategy? Indeed, Harry Patch, the last Tommy, who died in 2009, wrote:

“All those lives lost for a war finished over a table. Now what is the sense in that?”

The Prime Minister refers to allies such as the French, the Russians, the Turks and the Kurds, but the Turks recently exploded a Russian military aircraft, and they continue to bomb the Kurds who are fighting Daesh in north-eastern Syria and in the Kurdish Regional Government area of northern Iraq. They are also accused of closing the trade border, necessitating a pontoon bridge that is subject to intermittent trade embargoes—the only relatively safe trade and transport route from the KRG. Turkey is making it harder for the Kurds to tackle Daesh.

The Russians were accused by the Syrians, while I was there, of bombing moderate opposition to Assad. Meanwhile, I spotted Hezbollah fighters in the Assad-controlled parts and streets of al-Qamishli. There are already too many agents in this conflict. The French, the Americans, the Russians, Israel, Turkey and others are already destroying Syria and deploying airstrikes there, with no strategic plans and little success. How can we proceed when we are not even sure who our allies are and who they are allied to? Why would the UK think that repeating the same mistakes could lead to a different conclusion?

The UK needs to support the creation of a safe no-bomb zone in Syria in the first instance to protect ground troops, such as they are, in tackling Assad and Daesh, and to protect internal refugees. We need to support Vienna, and a more comprehensive strategy aimed at a democratic solution to the civil war. Key to defeating Daesh is stopping the money flow. Contrary

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to some impressions, Daesh operates extremely strategically, closing supply routes and controlling infrastructure. Serious money props that up. Where is it coming from? Who supplies the arms? Who is purchasing the oil? Cutting the funding will kill Daesh more effectively than gesture airstrikes.

The people I spoke to in Syria stayed in Syria because they want to fight Assad and Daesh. We owe them better than treating them merely as statistics, and their country as a casualty of perceived international obligations.

##### 8 pm

**Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con):** None of us comes lightly to the decision we make today, but one thing that I am sure of is that at the forefront of all our minds is the safety and security of every one of our constituents. In coming to my decision today, I have read all my constituents’ letters and emails. I have also asked myself a number of time-honoured questions about whether a conflict is just. Will this military action promote a just cause? Are our intentions right? Is there legislative authority? Is this a last resort? Is there a probability of success? Is the action proportionate?

Time prohibits a detailed response, but although in an ideal world no right-thinking person would advocate military action, we do not live in an ideal world—far from it. We and our constituents live with the very real, present and vicious threat of the evil ideology of ISIL, whose ultimate aim is nothing less than to destroy civilised society as we know it. The motion asks for authority for military action—airstrikes—

“exclusively against ISIL in Syria”

in order “to defend the UK” and

“prevent terrorist acts by ISIL”.

Can anyone doubt that that is a just cause?

Do we have the right intentions? Just as the UK is compassionately motivated in seeking humanitarian efforts in Syria, supporting refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan and welcoming refugees here, I believe the support for this motion in many parts of the House is born out of the same compassion for the suffering Syrian people—children raped, Christians tortured, aid workers beheaded, and whole families dispossessed, having been given three choices by ISIL: submit, leave or die. If our end goal for them is successful post-conflict stabilisation, and we want protection for them in the meantime from an evil and barbaric oppressor that threatens not only their peace and security but ours, I believe that we have the right intentions.

Do we have legitimate authority? If this House supports our Government, it will note that we have a clear legal basis for defending the UK under the UN charter.

**Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con):** Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the unanimous nature of the Security Council resolution? There can be no question but that the Russians and the Chinese are with us in standing against this dreadful threat.

**Fiona Bruce:** I do indeed. The wider international community, through the Security Council resolution, says that ISIL constitutes

“an unprecedented threat to international peace and security”

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and called on states to take “all necessary measures” to prevent terrorist acts by ISIL. We note, too, the request from other sovereign states, including our allies, France and the US, for military support. The next question is whether this is a last resort. Ongoing diplomatic, humanitarian and political endeavours are continuing, but airstrikes, while not enough in themselves, will be an essential component if we are to degrade and defeat this terrible force.

Finally, what of the probability of success? That is the hardest question of all. There can be no guarantees, as we have been told, but yes, I believe that there is a probability of success, in terms of degrading ISIL; weakening its capacity to attack our citizens; preventing the spread of its hideous caliphates in Syria; reducing its training bases, with their allure to those at risk of radicalisation; attacking ISIL’s control centres in Raqqa and elsewhere, from which jihadists are sent out to other lands; and reducing the spread of its terrible ideology. Considering all of that, I have concluded in good conscience and good faith that supporting the Government’s motion tonight and the action proposed is both right and just.

##### 8.5 pm

**Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab):** We have heard some excellent and thoughtful speeches today. Deep issues are involved in this debate, but I want to touch on a matter that many right hon. and hon. Members raised earlier: the Prime Minister’s use of the abusive term “terrorist sympathisers” to describe those Members who vote against the Government’s motion tonight as they believe that he has not adequately addressed concerns that have been raised. ISIL/Daesh struck and deeply hurt the Eccles community through the savage murder of my constituent Alan Henning. That community came together—Muslims and Christians—to mourn our loss and to celebrate the life of our local hero. If I choose to vote against airstrikes in Syria today, as I will do, it will be deeply offensive to me and to that community for me to be labelled a terrorist sympathiser for my decision. Not a single person in Eccles or the rest of my constituency has said to me that we should authorise airstrikes in Syria because of the hurt caused to our community by the savage murder of Alan Henning.

I have listened carefully to the arguments in the debate. The issue about the 70,000 troops the Prime Minister says we can work with has been raised many times. Those at the briefing MPs were given heard that actually only 40,000 of those troops are open to western influence, with 30,000 being more strongly Islamist and only potentially open to political participation.

This is a key question and we did not hear many answers. The Prime Minister says that the troops are “not ideal”, the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) has called them “mythical” and the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) called them “bogus battalions”. It is important to be clear not just about the numbers; as has been said, the strategy does not address what can stop the moderates splitting into many separate militias, given that they are already splintered. It would have been better to work

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through the issues relating to the possibility of co-ordinating action with those ground troops before this decision had to be taken.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) gave his reasons for not supporting the motion, describing the military action the Prime Minister asks us to support as a “gesture” and not “effective” military action—a gesture that would not get rid of Daesh and would not get rid of Assad. I agree with my right hon. Friend, and I also agree with colleagues who say that we must be sure we are taking the right action, the justified action and the action that will be effective. I am not convinced about the proposed action and I will be voting against the Government’s motion.

##### 8.7 pm

**Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con):** We can often have too partial a view of parliamentary history when dealing with issues of military intervention. I believe the relevant history is not so much the votes on Iraq in 2003, but those on Iraq in 2014. The motion on 26 September 2014 was agreed by a majority of 491, so should we now be extending it and extending RAF operations from Iraq to Syria?

It should not surprise us that my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) opposes the extension to Syria, because he opposed the motion on operations in Iraq. The same is true of the hon. Members for Newport West (Paul Flynn) and for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) and the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), who have all spoken against today and all voted against operations in Iraq. It particularly should not surprise us that the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), opposes extending operations to Syria, because not only did he oppose that September 2014 motion, but he was a teller in the No Lobby. He made it very clear then, as I am sure he would have done if he had had more of an opportunity to respond to my intervention, that he, seemingly in principle, opposed the operations in Iraq.

By implication, that means that those Members do not support what has been happening in Iraq, doing good there and regaining 30% of the territory held by Daesh. They are going against the context of our operations in Iraq. I remind the House that those operations sought to go to the aid of Iraq and support people’s right to defend themselves. We were seeking to support them in their efforts to defend themselves against those ISIL genocidal jihadists who were going against Muslims, Christians and Yazidis. We should not forget that context, because that is what led us to vote in favour of action by such an overwhelming majority. The history behind this vote is as much about Kosovo in 1998 as it is about Iraq in 2003. When we look at the liberation of Sinjar, which was brought about because of the support of RAF pilots and our allies, we should remember that it was opposed by the Leader of the Opposition. We saw the horrors of Sinjar.

**Mr Robin Walker:** My hon. Friend is making some powerful points. Does he agree that crucial in our intervention in Iraq to date has been the fact that there have not been civilian casualties from the RAF action?

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That shows that we have the capability to take incisive action against terrorist targets without putting civilian lives at risk.

**Mr Burrowes:** That is right. The hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) described as a disgrace the operations that are taking place. However, it was not a disgrace to liberate Sinjar. [Hon. Members: “Hear, hear.”] The action has been effective, proportionate and is not leading to the loss of civilian lives. The grim reality, the horrors in Sinjar were revealed: the mass graves of older women who had been butchered by ISIL.

We should stand four-square behind these operations, which should be extended. Along with the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), I wanted the motion in 2014 to go further. Like him, I recognise the important international principle of a treaty to protect people from genocide. That is what we were seeing in Iraq and Syria. The duty to authorise force extended logically both to Iraq and Syria. So I wanted us to go further then. To be consistent with the decision in 2014, I want us to extend our operations to Syria. As I said to the Prime Minister then, the genocidal actions of ISIL jihadists have no borders. We need to understand that ISIL has the same intent now as it did in 2014. The right to defend Iraqis and the right to defend our UK citizens means that there should be no border in our operations between Iraq and Syria.

We have heard many Members offer their expert opinion about the effectiveness of the operations. We must be careful that we do not become armchair—or Bench—generals. Surely we should accept the evidence from the armed forces, security services and the Joint Intelligence Committee that we have a very clear and imminent threat to our citizens, and that we have a proportionate response to it. My question to my constituents is this: if one of those seven planned attacks on the UK in the past 12 months had not been thwarted and had got through, what would I have done? I would have had to look my constituents and their families in the eye and say that we must tackle the threat by going—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I call Ruth Smeeth.

##### 8.12 pm

**Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab):** There is no more solemn or important duty of this House than the decision to authorise military action, and it has weighed heavily on me in recent days. To risk putting our servicemen and women in harm’s way is a great and heavy burden, as indeed it should be.

In recent months, we have seen the horror of the attacks in Paris, Tunisia, Lebanon and Turkey committed by Daesh. Even those acts of terror fail to tell the story of the full scale of the threat that faces us and the fact that it is growing. In 2014, there were 15 global attacks perpetuated by Daesh. This year, we have seen 150 so far.

**Angela Smith:** May I add to my hon. Friend’s list by pointing out that seven potential attacks in the UK over the past year have been prevented by our counter-terrorism services? Will she take this opportunity to put on the record our appreciation of our intelligence services and the role they have played in preventing terrorism here in the UK?

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**Ruth Smeeth:** Absolutely, and I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention.

The threat to us is not theoretical. Our friends and allies across the world have to live with the consequences, and now they are asking for our help. We must not forget the murder and mayhem being visited on the people of Syria and Iraq. When Daesh began pushing north from Mosul to capture Yazidi villages, the men and women were separated. First, the Yazidi men and boys were taken out to the countryside and machine-gunned en masse. After that, the women were separated by age: those who were too old to be kept as slaves for Daesh were shot, and the rest were rounded up as spoils of war. The mass graves from those killings are beginning to be unearthed following the liberation of Sinjar by Kurdish forces, which was supported by us.

The sheer barbarism of this organisation is difficult to comprehend, and I cannot look myself in the mirror every day if I know that we are allowing this evil to thrive. Members across the House have rightly pointed out that recent events across the middle east must give us pause for thought whenever and wherever we consider any further intervention. I agree, but my country and my party have a proud history of standing up to tyranny and intervening to protect people from poisonous ideologies and evil despots.

That began with the fight against fascism in the 1930s. If you were to visit the town hall in Stoke-on-Trent you would find a plaque commemorating the veterans of the international brigades. The men and women of that movement risked their lives for their commitment to internationalism and solidarity, standing against an ideology that posed an existential threat to our way of life. Daesh poses no less a threat. For the Opposition, the spirit of internationalism, humanitarian intervention and solidarity with people across the world is one of the longest and proudest traditions of the British left, which is why we must not fall into the mindset of isolationism.

We must recognise that issues of war are never clear-cut. There is a cost of inaction, as much as there is a cost of action, and if we allow atrocities to go unpunished and unrestrained we will bear the burden. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, we have a duty to come to the aid of our allies in times of war. As a liberal democracy, we have a duty to stamp out the evils of religious fascism wherever it rears its head. As an outward-looking internationalist nation we have a duty to play our part against a global threat.

**Rebecca Pow:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ruth Smeeth:** It is too late, sorry.

If we grow to fear the responsibility of our actions, we will find ourselves incapable of meeting our obligations to the country, to our allies and to our values. We will all enter the Division Lobbies tonight with a heavy heart, knowing that there are consequences to our vote, whichever way we choose to act. I am making the difficult decision to vote for extended action against Daesh. No one seeks war, but I genuinely believe that this is the best way to support Syrians and protect our citizens.

##### 8.16 pm

**Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con):** May I say that I value greatly the speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for South Dorset (Richard Drax), for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), and for Plymouth,

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Moor View (Johnny Mercer)? I also value all the constituents who have contacted me. I also value constituents who I know have been praying.

I believe that Daesh has effectively declared war on us. I believe that Tunisia and the seven thwarted attacks are effectively acts of war. In my constituency, I am incredibly grateful for the services of the security forces and the police. During the rugby world cup most of the blood spilled was on the rugby field. Of course, today and tomorrow, I am concerned. I am amazed by the RAF and the work that it has done in Iraq. I am amazed that we have made airstrikes and that there have not been any civilian casualties. It is right that we should allow our forces to cross that border, which the enemy does not recognise, but I am also aware that airstrikes in Syria may result in civilian casualties. Whether I walk through the Lobby to your right, Mr Speaker, or to your left, I believe that civilians will die.

I am pleased, however, that in the motion the Government have linked military action with humanitarian and diplomatic action. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for International Development and to the Under-Secretary of State for Refugees, as I have asked them not to forget the refugees in this area who were there before the crisis. I am reassured that all our action will be for those refugees as well—the Palestinian refugees in the camp provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in Syria.

Over 10 years ago, I marched with 1 million other people against the war. Today, I believe that it is different: there is a United Nations resolution and there are Arab countries that will align with us. When I go into the Aye Lobby, it will be for the refugees and it will be for the security of Twickenham.

##### 8.19 pm

**Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP):** I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias). We overlapped slightly in Gaza, where we both served. I served there as a surgeon for a year and a half, having started my career in Belfast, where I grew up, so I have seen the human results of violence, whether it is due to terrorism or to bombing. It is not pretty and it is not something that any of us would wish.

Having grown up in Northern Ireland—obviously, there are Members on these Benches who are based there—I wonder how we would have felt if someone thought we could have solved that problem by airstrikes. We are talking about a situation that is complex. We have heard all the objections to military intervention. I will not go over them again as I have only three minutes, but the chance of chaos is high. Russia wants one thing, Turkey wants another. Has anyone informed the Kurds, to whom we are all paying great tribute, that no one has any plans to give them a homeland at the end of this? A hundred years on, yet again they are being allowed to fight, but we are promising them nothing.

Going into any military action, it is important to understand the basics. Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? What is the goal? How will we define victory, and what will our exit strategy be? We have had a complex, fairly tragic and incoherent approach to the

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middle east for decades. When I worked in Gaza, people described to me death falling from the sky all the time—sometimes directly from western powers, sometimes from regimes that we either supported or created, all the way from the Shah of Iran to Saddam Hussein. We have supported militias and rebels when we thought they could be of use, but what have they turned into—the mujaheddin becoming the Taliban; the rebels and chaos in Libya.

We hear about a patchwork of 70,000 boots on the ground in Syria. What will they become? Are they our next problem? It is not that anyone here supports Daesh, despite intemperate comments. It is the fact that we do not believe airstrikes will work. The two points that were raised were national security and stability in the middle east. We will recruit extremists there; we will radicalise people here.

We all have sympathy with Paris, but that will not make bombing any more effective, so for those who have been struggling with their consciences and how to vote, I beg them please to think again and vote against the motion.

##### 8.22 pm

**Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con):** Following the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), I am struck once again that on the one hand in this debate we are grappling with what is no more than a minor tactical correction in the conduct of the air war against ISIS, and on the other hand we are trying to judge an overall strategic plan which has been formulated among a rather disparate and disunited coalition and which is necessarily chaotic, fluid and bound to change. That is in the context of a 14 or 15-year campaign that we have been mounting since 9/11 against a global Islamist insurgency, and we have not yet begun to get the measure of that campaign.

In Northern Ireland, to which the hon. Lady referred, we spent 10 or 15 years getting it wrong. The west is now faced with a far more complex international problem. We are learning, we are discussing, and this debate is perhaps part of that process, but we have not yet got near the full and comprehensive understanding that will win us this campaign in the long run. Mistakes will continue to be made, but that does not mean that we can turn our back on the present situation. There are risks whichever way we turn.

Another aspect that we have heard periodically in this debate is that what is now visited upon us is somehow our fault; that we are being punished for our own mistakes and errors; that the terrorist attacks on our own country are something that we have provoked. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the terrorist threat. The west is omnipresent in the Muslim world. We are beamed in by satellite. The people there are challenging their own outdated religious power structures. Women want equality. Young people aspire to be educated at western universities. That is challenging the whole structure of the Muslim world, and the extremes of the Muslim world are striking back at us. They are not going to leave us alone if we disengage, so we have to engage with the problem. We might go on getting it wrong and making mistakes, but that is the nature of warfare.

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The attacks in Paris were an act of war. We have been suffering such acts of war against our country since 9/11, and even before. The west is going to have to become more coherent and more united in its response. Perhaps the most significant strategic effect of this decision is that we will be joining our coalition partners and helping to create that diplomatic and political process.

##### 8.25 pm

**Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op):** In 2013 I voted against military action in Syria, and I was happy to do so, because I did not think that the case had been made or that a plan was in place. I thought that through extraordinarily carefully, because I was very conscious of what the Assad regime was doing, and is still doing, to civilians in Syria. In all the sound and fury and rhetoric around that debate and this debate, it is absolutely vital to cut through and get to the heart of what we are actually discussing. I am very much taken with what has been said about this being an extension of existing action. This is not about starting a war or carpet bombing civilians, as one person has suggested to me; it is about extending military action against a barbarous regime that threatens our own citizens.

Like the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), I believe what is proposed meets the criteria of a just war. It meets the criteria on legality, proportionality, prospects of success and last resort. We also have a clear UN resolution. The idea has been put around that we somehow need a chapter 7 resolution, but that is simply not the case. The House of Commons Library has set out the situation carefully, stating:

“Phrases such as ‘all necessary measures’, as used in UNSCR 2249, are usually code for the use of force in other Security Council Resolutions… It is immaterial that they do not mention using force.”

It then points to a number of examples of different ways in which the UN has argued for that.

There is a case for self-defence in international law. There is also a case for operating against a non-state actor that threatens us when the sovereign state in that area is unable or unwilling to act against it. We have a call from our allies, from France and others, including Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, and the Germans are getting involved as well. There is also the military practicality to consider, with this imaginary border on which we can only operate on one side.

Then there is the direct threat to the UK and our citizens. I say that carefully, because of the individuals who were recruited from my constituency and went to fight in Syria. They communicated with people in this country and may well have been involved in plots against this country. That is a very serious thing to consider, because dealing with Daesh’s ideology will require more than a military strategy. We also have to tackle it here, for example by disrupting its communications methods, and in terms of security, tackling ideology, community relations and local policing. As long as that regime remains a beacon in the region, inspiring, recruiting and directing people, we will continue to have a problem, even if we meet all the other criteria.

I have my doubts about ground troops and the hopes being placed in the political process, and I have concerns about the Government’s failure to follow through on

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reconstruction in the past. However, we cannot let perfection be the enemy. I have had to consider whether those concerns outweigh the reasons I outlined at the beginning of my remarks. My answer is no, which is why I will be supporting the Government’s motion tonight.

##### 8.28 pm

**Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con):** It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), because I agree with virtually everything he said. The key point is this: something dreadful and totally unacceptable is happening, and we have to act. UN resolution 2249 gives us the scope to do something. It sets out the reason for urgency and the reason why we have to take action.

We have to remember that Daesh is operating in a state that is broken in Syria, and in a state that is almost broken in northern Iraq. We are extending the same treatment from Iraq to Syria. It is not a huge expansion; it is simply a question of moving to Syria because there is a need to do so. That need is about ensuring that we really strike at the heart of this dreadful regime.

It is also imperative that we do a series of other things. We cannot avoid the need to operate through the Vienna process, for instance, because we need our allies. The key point about resolution 2249 and the request from France and from the United States is that we are wanted—we are actually needed—in this fight. By demonstrating resolution and commitment, we are strengthening the cause of the allies generally to deal with this problem.

**Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** Does the hon. Gentleman think it is rather perplexing that more effort has not been made by the Government and others to deal with the arms trade in the middle east, to close the Turkish border, which is so fluid, to the terrorists, and to tackle the problem of funding from Saudi Arabia?

**Neil Carmichael:** The Prime Minister made it very clear in his speech, as he has done previously, that we are taking those steps. Of course more needs to be done, but things are happening, and with rigour and appropriateness to the challenges ahead. Absolutely we need to do more, and more will be done.

The battle of ideas is absolutely crucial. It is a fact that our way of life is being challenged—it is under attack. Our democracy, our internationalism and our tolerance are under attack. That is what we have to defend, and that is why it is important that we stand up and fight against what is absolutely awful. It is important that we state those three things, among others, because that is how we remind moderate Muslims that it is important to value those things too.

**Dr Whitford:** Does the hon. Gentleman not see a danger in Saudi Arabia being given such a huge role? The Saudis do not share our way of life—women are not well treated there—and yet we are giving them a huge role in the region.

**Neil Carmichael:** That is an important intervention. However, the danger I see is one where we do not participate and do not apply our values, our skills and our leadership in this cause.

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The difference between now and before is that we need unity on this more than ever. The interesting thing about the vote we had on Syria last time is that we should have acted then, because the chaos that has raged in Syria since has made it possible for Islamic State to do so well in developing its infrastructure and reach. We have to bear that in mind. We do not want to make the same mistake again. That would be fatal to our interests in the western world and to our ambition to create a new middle east where good governance thrives, the economy is successful, and the culture is great. My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) hit the nail on the head when he talked about that future, that ambition, that desire for the middle east.

As I have said so often in this House, this is about working together as nations, sharing our capacities, our policies, and our willingness to make a difference. That is why I am voting with the Government tonight. I do so on the basis of considerable thought and considerable discussion with people in my constituency. Ultimately our responsibility is to stand firm with our allies, defeat a terrible scourge on our globe, and make sure that we can rebuild, as rebuild we must.

##### 8.33 pm

**Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab):** Following the horrifying attacks in Sousse, in Ankara, over Sinai, in Beirut, and most recently in Paris, no one should be any doubt about the capability and intention of Daesh to carry out further acts of terrorism across the globe. There has to be a strong international response, and the UK should be part of that. Enough has been said about comments the Prime Minister may have made last night. For my part, having prosecuted some of the most serious terrorist plots in this country and worked with a number of members of the Prime Minister’s Front Bench to thwart terrorism, I hope the House is clear about where my sympathies are on this matter.

The question is whether there is a lawful, coherent and compelling case for airstrikes. So far as lawful is concerned, much has been said about UN resolution 2249. In and of itself, it does not authorise force, but I accept it implies a reference to self-defence, which would be a lawful basis for action that has been taken and that may be taken in future.

For me, the question is whether, if lawful, the action is none the less compelling and coherent. The argument that there is no logic in taking military action in Iraq but not in Syria is seductive and powerful, but in the end unconvincing. The situation in Syria is very different from the situation in Iraq. The civil war has a different dynamic, the opposition forces are differently constituted and Russia is of course more heavily involved in support of the Assad Government.

That does not mean that there should be no response in Syria, and there is much in the Prime Minister’s motion—in relation to the Vienna process, the talks for a transition to an inclusive Syria and humanitarian suffering—with which I would agree, but whether there should be airstrikes is another matter. I am not against airstrikes per se, and I accept that it is difficult to see how territory can be taken from Daesh without them. In my view, however, airstrikes without an effective

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ground force are unlikely to make any meaningful contribution to defeating Daesh, and there is no effective ground force.

**Graham Evans:** Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Keir Starmer:** I will not give way, because lots of people have been waiting to speak.

The Prime Minister’s reliance on what he calls “70,000 Syrian opposition fighters” on the ground is wholly unrealistic. They are a disparate group of individuals with varying motivations and capabilities. By definition, they are oppositional, and it is hard to see how we could honour and protect them without being drawn into conflict with Russia. On that basis, I will vote against the motion tonight. I will, however, say this: I respect Members from both sides of the House who hold a different view, and if the Prime Minister’s motion is passed, I will support our forces in action.

##### 8.36 pm

**Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con):** Tonight’s motion on Daesh or ISIL is a defining moment of this Parliament. I follow the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who made a typically thoughtful speech, and outstanding speeches were made from the Labour Benches earlier by the right hon. Members for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) and for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), and the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), all of whom highlighted the seriousness of the threat to our nation, the powerful United Nations Security Council resolution and the urging of regional Governments and our closest neighbour, France, for us to take action.

Many other Members have argued—rightly, I believe—that tonight’s motion covers a logical extension of what we have already voted overwhelmingly for in Iraq across a boundary that the terrorists do not recognise. However, some have argued that the RAF would make no difference to what our allies are already doing, and that the risks to civilians in Syria are too great. If either were true, why would our allies want us in Syria and why would the Iraqi Government want us in Iraq? If the House felt it was true that we were achieving nothing in Iraq, we would surely be criticising the Government and calling not just for debates, but for the return of our armed forces. If it was true, the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) would surely be calling for no airstrikes at all from RAF Lossiemouth. He is not and we are not, and I believe that there is a good cause for saying that we have made a difference in Iraq.

Tonight, I believe we can find much common ground across all parties through supporting a close European partner and our closest ally, through the umbrella legitimacy of the UN, through the competence of the RAF and through the logic of extending our operational boundaries. To those of my constituents with doubts, I say that it is important to remember that we are not invading Syria, that we are not waging war against Islam or Muslims and that, as the motion says, this is one part of a broader political strategy.

Our Government’s big challenge is to defeat ISIL so that a peace settlement can have meaning on the ground. It will be unbelievably difficult, given the blood under

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the bridge and the political, tribal, religious and war-scarred differences of those around the table in Vienna. However, as with Dayton a generation ago, a difficult settlement and transition is the eventual key. Unlike with Dayton, we have a role to play in the peace making and subsequent regeneration. That agreement and the governance that follows are what Syria needs. Its success or failure will determine, a generation on, whether we are seen to have played a positive role.

I did not enter this House with any enthusiasm to commission our armed forces to take lives and risk their own, but we have a duty to protect our constituents and the threat is real, so I will vote for the motion and I urge colleagues from all parties to do so, for a decision not to do so would send the wrong message to friend and foe alike.

##### 8.40 pm

**Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab):** Like other Members, I have struggled to work out what is the right thing to do this evening, faced with a very difficult decision, as I have done with every decision regarding military action since I have been a Member of this House. In the last Parliament, I voted in favour of action in Libya and in Iraq in 2014, and I voted against action in Syria in 2013. I know how hard it is to vote both in favour of action and against action. I have learned in the five and a half years that I have been a Member of this place that it is almost impossible to say, with the benefit of hindsight, which of those decisions was 100% right or 100% wrong. Having weighed up the arguments on tonight’s motion, I will be voting against it.

Before I explain my reasons for that, let me say that, as the House knows, I am a Muslim. Those who know me well know that my belief in God and in my religion is not just a small part of my identity or simply a box that I tick on the census, but the defining characteristic of my life. I am a Sunni too—Sunni born, Sunni raised and, since I have been old enough to make my own mind up about these things, a Sunni by choice.

Although there is a wide variety of opinion and practice within Sunni Islam, we can all agree that ISIL is not representative of our faith and not representative of Sunni Muslims. They are Nazi-esque totalitarians who are outlaws from Islam, who engage in indiscriminate slaughter and who murder any Muslim who does not agree with them. If you are different or if you disagree, you die. I am well aware that under ISIL, a Muslim like myself would be killed, so please believe me when I say that I do not simply want to see ISIL defeated; I want to see it eradicated.

However, I believe that the proposed action will not work. That is why I cannot vote for it. I fear, primarily, the chaos that might come from a vacuum or ungoverned space. Many Members have said that airstrikes alone will not work, and I agree. We cannot simply bomb the ground; we need a strategy to hold it as well. On that point, I have listened carefully to the arguments about the 70,000 moderates. Normally, we believe that our enemy’s enemy is our friend, but in this case I believe that our enemy’s enemy will turn out not to be our friend. There are too many different groups, with too many shifting allegiances and objectives.

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**Imran Hussain:** Does my hon. Friend agree that many British Sunni Muslims and other British Muslims would agree with her sentiments on this evil sect of Daesh?

**Shabana Mahmood:** I agree with that point and believe that, on this matter, I am able to speak for the wider British Muslim and British Sunni community.

What of Russia? It, too, is acting against ISIL, but it is also bombing the very moderates that the Government will rely on to hold the ground following the airstrikes. I think back to the decision regarding Syria in 2013, when I feared that action against Assad without a more comprehensive strategy would create a vacuum that would lead to more militancy, for which we would be responsible. Now I believe that an ISIL-first strategy risks strengthening Assad and creating another deeper crisis, for which we would also be responsible.

As for our own security, my instinct tells me that the threat to us will probably be the same whether we act or do not act. ISIL will not give us a free pass if we vote against action, but we will not be any more in its sights if we vote in favour of it.

It has been suggested in the last day or so that when the time for the apportionment of blame comes, those who vote in favour of the motion will have to step forward and there will be nowhere to hide. The implication is that if Members vote against it, as I will, they can avoid the blame. To those who think that way, I say this: if only the world were that simple. There will be consequences and innocent people will die from action or inaction. Whatever we decide tonight, we will all bear a measure of responsibility.

##### 8.44 pm

**Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) who spoke from personal experience and conviction, and with great passion, even though she has come to a different conclusion from me.

Matters of war and peace, and the security of the United Kingdom, are the primary responsibility of the Government and this House. This is the first time in my capacity as a Member of the House that I have been asked to vote on committing the UK to military action, and I assure fellow Members, as well as my constituents, that this is not a vote I take lightly.

I have carefully considered the arguments made by the Government, and it is clear that Daesh poses a direct threat to the UK. Recent attacks in Tunisia, Turkey, Lebanon, the downing of a Russian passenger plane above Egypt, and more recently the horrific attacks in Paris, show that Daesh is capable of truly international terrorism. Clearly, it is a terrorist group that does not respect borders, and the people of the United Kingdom are in its sights too.

Every day when I come to this House I see the notification telling me that the threat level to this country and its people is severe. That means that a terrorist attack is highly likely. Indeed, we have heard already that seven terrorist plots have been foiled this year, and those were either linked to or inspired by Daesh and its deadly propaganda. I pay tribute to our intelligence services on whom we rely to keep us safe.

As Daesh grows in strength and audacity, our security is increasingly under threat. In my view, when a UN Security Council resolution calls on member states to

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take “all necessary measures” to prevent terrorist acts by Daesh and eradicate its safe haven, we have a responsibility to answer that call.

Over recent months a number of my constituents have contacted me about the situation in Syria and the plight of its people. Along with others, I recently visited the Zaatari camp, which is the largest in Jordan and just 14 miles from the Syrian border. People in those camps live in the most basic conditions, and their only desire is to go home to Syria. Peace in the region depends on us reaching agreements in Vienna, and that process is crucial.

Destroying ISIL, bringing peace to Syria and Iraq, and rebuilding the shattered lives of their populations will be hard and will require a multi-layered approach by a broad coalition of nations. In my view the UK has a moral obligation to assist our allies in that fight, and ultimately to help return Syria to its people. For that reason, I will be supporting the Government and voting for the motion.

##### 8.47 pm

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** I have held the Prime Minister’s proposal to the fire with experts, academics, people from the region, and military personnel. I have read more than 2,000 communications, and on Monday night I had a meeting in my constituency with more than 400 people present. More than 99% of those said no to the Prime Minister’s plans.

Daesh exhibits the most heinous and murderous ideology, but how will precision weapons find their target without co-ordination on the ground? We have heard how important ground forces are, but Daesh integrates into local populations. Local people work for Daesh to avoid being murdered—they do not share its ideology, but they do so to save their lives. Without a concrete military force, people will be put at risk and there will be serious casualties.

We have heard about the Free Syrian Army. On 20 October the Foreign Secretary came to the House and said that it was 80,000 strong, and on 26 November the Prime Minister said it was 70,000 strong. Yesterday I heard that there are 40,000 moderates, and today I hear that there are 15,000 people with whom we can work. In reality, those fighters are a disparate group. We have heard about the shifting sands, and many groups are co-ordinated under an umbrella. We do not know whether they will jump to western orders. They are fighting another, more conventional war, and will they move to fighting a more difficult conflict and a different enemy? People have fought against Assad to protect land. Will they be willing to move across the country to fight in a different area and give up the land that they have protected or tried to gain? We must ask such questions before we proceed. To take more time is not to admit defeat. It is about us being politicians and scrutinising what is before us. There is no loss of face in stepping back in order to step forward.

We must also listen to the people living on the ground who have said no to this action. No one in this place has the wisdom of Solomon, but it is clear that this strategy is weak and the sequencing is wrong. I will be voting to reject the motion. I ask the Government to come back

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with a more comprehensive ground plan, which we would be able to scrutinise. Hopefully, we can move forward to deal with Daesh and its evil plot.

##### 8.50 pm

**Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con):** Yesterday, while preparing for this debate, I was accused by certain people on social media—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is quite a lot of really rather disconcerting and discourteous chuntering from Members on both sides of the House, including from the Foreign Secretary, whose hon. Friend has the floor and will be heard. If Members wish to conduct an argument they will do it outside the Chamber, be they ever so high. Let us be clear about that.

**Marcus Fysh:** Yesterday I was accused by certain people on social media of having no care for my children and no thought for people in Syria. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our families and our children, and those families and children from the middle east and north Africa, whether in their homes or displaced, are the future of our world. We want them to play and grow without fear in that world, to see good and beauty in it, and to see the point of trying to make it better. When they ask what I did today, I want them to know that I stood up for them.

We want to make life on the ground better for people, and to protect them from indiscriminate and summary injustice. We want to allow humanity, to restore normal life and to offer better ideas. Our involvement can make a positive difference and we must not shirk it. Militarily, we can take out targets that threaten us, or those on the ground, with more precision, so saving lives. We are not bombing Syria in the way that some allege.

Diplomatically, our involvement will give us the best chance to shape efforts towards a lasting political settlement. If we want to be able to negotiate sometimes very firmly, as we should, with Russia, Iran, the Syrian establishment and our allies in the Gulf states and beyond, we have to be credible. We cannot expect to have influence with them and to shape our world if we are unwilling to use the powers we have, when asked, to make the transition to a political solution less painful than it otherwise might be.

We want the civil war in Syria to end and for hope to return. I am persuaded that there is right here, in Vienna and in our firm diplomatic strategy backed by action tonight a real chance that we can help that to happen politically. I commend what is, in fact, a comprehensive strategy to the House.

##### 8.53 pm

**Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab):** I will be voting against the Government tonight, but I will not be doing so with any certainty that what I am doing is correct. I envy all those Members who are certain about what the right decision is today. I envy those who have contacted me on Twitter. I envy my constituents and party members who contacted me and said it is a no-brainer, that it is obvious what we should do. It has not been obvious to me. It has been very, very difficult indeed.

I listened to a number of contributions from hon. Friends who will be in a different Lobby tonight, voting with the Government, and I agreed with a great deal of

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what they had to say. It has been incredibly difficult to come to a decision. I agree that Daesh is a peril that must be defeated and that it is an evil scourge that inflicts misery on huge numbers of Muslims. It has killed far more Muslims than westerners. I also agree that we should not lightly turn our back on our allies. We should have tremendous solidarity with the people of France, upon whom such misery and carnage has recently been visited. As an internationalist, it is not easy for me to turn my back on the United Nations resolution, and I agree that the proposed action has a strong legal basis.

Why, then, will I not support the motion? Because I believe that sometimes the kindest thing one can do as a friend is to say to that friend that the direction they are taking in their moment of torment might not be the resolution to the problems they face. I listened with great intent to yesterday’s briefing from the Foreign Secretary and others, which I thought was incredibly professional, but it was not able to answer the central point about the ground forces.

When people say, “We are doing it in Iraq, so why are we not doing it in Syria?”, the simple answer is that we are doing it in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi Government and with the support of the Iraqi ground forces. I believe that the political process—a fledgling process—which has the promise of nations working together in the International Syria Support Group, must be given a chance to work. If we have an international transition plan and this fledgling stage starts to lead to something, we will then have the possibility that these ground forces will turn away from Assad and towards ISIL, and we will realise the potential of our actions actually to deliver what we all desperately want—the end of ISIL and a better and more promising future for the people of Syria.

##### 8.56 pm

**Byron Davies (Gower) (Con):** There can be no graver or more serious topic for us to debate than the use of military force. I have had a great deal of correspondence from my constituents, and I have read every bit of it. I listened to what my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Marcus Fysh) said. We are asking young men and women to go fight and potentially die while engaging in the use of force in another land.

The Prime Minister and the Government have set out serious and powerful arguments for airstrikes against Daesh. It is clear from the motion that it is Daesh exclusively that will be targeted. Equally, I have heard thoughtful, sincere and forensic arguments from Members on both sides of the debate.

There are many questions, and the answers to them need to be crystal clear. We cannot make the mistakes of the past by failing to have a plan for all ethnicities and sects to have an equal place in a post-conflict Syria. If we fail in our solemn duty to do this, we will be doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past—the mistakes whose shadow covers the middle east, and the consequences of which are deeply rooted in some of the current conflicts and proxy wars that are taking place in the region.

From numerous reports from people who have escaped the dreadful regime of Daesh in Syria, it appears that its statehood project is failing. We must ask ourselves

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whether British airstrikes will help that effort further to weaken and eventually bring about the destruction of Daesh in its stronghold. Our intelligence therefore has to be highly dependable and accurate.

Furthermore, we must ensure that our allies in the middle east are playing their part in this battle. According to a Department of Defence official in the United States, Saudi Arabia has not flown a mission against Daesh in three months, Jordan in four months and the United Arab Emirates in nine months. We need to ensure that there is no political void within the coalition of countries that need to be part of any serious solution to this conflict.

Let me deal with my decision on how to vote on the issue. I am sure that we all feel the weight of history and understand the position of others who have had to vote on issues of war in this House. There can never be absolute certainty about the outcome of any military action, despite the fact that we are all certain of the need to destroy Daesh.

While we have heard very clear arguments about the dangers of acting, there are equal dangers in not acting. Let me quote a former US President, General Dwight Eisenhower:

“Neither a wise man nor a brave man lies down on the tracks of history to wait for the train of the future to run over him.”

I, of course, do not profess to be wise or brave, but I support the Government in this matter. Should we wait for another Paris situation to happen here or should we act now? We should act now.

##### 8.59 pm

**Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** I congratulate the Foreign Affairs Committee on producing this excellent and thoughtful report. I commend it to any hon. Member who has not had a chance to read it. I hope that the Prime Minister takes cognisance of the fact that the Committee reported last night that it was not convinced that the concerns contained in its report had been met.

Just three or four weeks ago, the Committee said that the

“extraordinary complexity of the situation on the ground”

meant that there were “few reliable counterparts”,

and that

“There appeared to be little chance of a legitimate and functioning ally emerging from the chaos”

any time soon. Now, miraculously, we are expected to believe that some 70,000 “moderate” troops are ready to fight on our behalf.

**Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP):** Members on both sides of the House have rightly made much of the professionalism and dedication of our servicemen and women. Do they not have a right to know alongside whom they will be fighting in any conflict in which they are set to take part?

**Brendan O’Hara:** One can only conclude that the 70,000 figure is a convenient arithmetical creation that adds together a multitude of people from different cultures and factions and with widely differing ambitions for the future of Syria, and I agree that people should be told exactly who they are. I fear that the 70,000 claim will define this Prime Minister’s drive for military intervention in the middle east, just as the claim that we

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were only 45 minutes from attack defined a previous Prime Minister’s justification for earlier misadventures in the region.

**Crispin Blunt:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way—and, given that he has been so kind about the Foreign Affairs Committee, the least that he deserves is another minute. May I draw his attention not only—obviously—to the Prime Minister’s statement, but to the work of Charles Lister, who is a visiting fellow at the Brookings Doha Centre? In a blog on the *Spectator*site, he broke down the 75,000 figure with reasonable accuracy. The key issue, however, is the change that has taken place over the last month in Vienna.

**Brendan O’Hara:** I certainly commend the Foreign Affairs Committee’s report, which is a first-class piece of work. It also said that any UK involvement in airstrikes was unlikely to constitute a war-winning intervention. Sir Simon Mayall told the Committee:

"This is not a war-winning air campaign, by any stretch of the imagination.”

Even the most enthusiastic cheerleader for UK airstrikes in Syria would have to agree that very few planes will actually be involved and that our contribution will be extremely small. At the same time, however, the Prime Minister was telling us that a major military plank of the argument for airstrikes was that we had a “unique contribution” to make. That “unique contribution” was the Brimstone missile. Indeed, he went on the record as saying that those missiles were “unique assets” that the RAF could contribute, and that he had been lobbied by our coalition partners to bring them to the theatre. As I pointed out to him, the Royal Saudi Air Force has been using Brimstone missiles since February this year.

Let us be honest, Mr Speaker. The UK Government’s desire to take part in the bombing of Syria is less a military contribution than a political statement. Since 2013, the Government have felt that they have been left on the sidelines, and have been itching for a piece of the action. As with so much of the UK’s thinking, this has more to do with how the UK will look to others than with our asking what good we can do. After decades of military intervention in the middle east, we do not have a success to show for it.

There are more than enough people dropping bombs on Syria. We do not have to add to the chaos, the misery and the inevitable casualties by doing so as well. Yes, Daesh is evil; yes, it must be defeated; and, yes, we have a contribution to make—but dropping bombs from 34,000 feet is not the way to do it. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past. Let us not embark on another middle eastern misadventure. Let us go in with a credible plan to win the peace and secure the future in Syria.

##### 9.4 pm

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** It is a pleasure to have the chance to speak straight after the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O’Hara). He has given us a range of problems, but he seemed somewhat lacking in potential solutions. The one thing I agree with the Scottish National party on is the change that the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) was pushing for—namely, that we should call

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those people Daesh. They are neither true to Islam nor a recognised state, and we should not give them credence by calling them anything other than Daesh.

For me, this is not about making some political statement. If there is a statement to be made, it is about the fact that when one of our allies is attacked, we will come to their aid. The bedrock of our defence is article 5 of the NATO treaty—the NATO that the SNP still wants to be part of—which deals with mutual defence. We will respond to an attack in Europe.

**Callum McCaig:** The hon. Gentleman mentioned the solidarity that we must show with our allies. Would he apply that to the Kurds, and to our NATO allies in Turkey?

**Kevin Foster:** We stood with the Kurds a year ago. This Parliament voted to intervene when the murderous thugs of Daesh were on their way to overrun the Kurdish Autonomous Region, which could have resulted in a massacre on the same level as that of Srebrenica. Members of my party—and, to be fair, members of other parties—wanted to do something about that. Some of the arguments we have heard today have been in favour of pulling away the air support that has helped to prevent Daesh from massacring the Kurds. It is the air support that represents solidarity, not warm words.

In approaching the motion, I have asked myself a number of questions. What specific objectives do we have for our involvement, along with our allies? Is there a clear legal basis for the action? What will a post-civil war Syria look like? Who or what will be the Government there, and how will our intervention assist in bringing that about? The question of legality is now much easier to answer. There is a pretty clear UN Security Council resolution. Had that resolution not been passed, we would have been hearing today about how we needed such a resolution. Now we have one, we are hearing that it is not quite enough. The reality is that no resolution would be enough to satisfy some in this Chamber, despite the clear wording of the one that we now have. The action is definitely legal.

What are our specific objectives? The ultimate objective is to clear Daesh away from the territory it controls, which gives it its power base.

**Ian Blackford:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Kevin Foster:** The hon. Gentleman has had plenty of interventions. I will not take this one.

This is about ensuring that we can assist our allies. It would be ludicrous if our allies were fighting a Daesh unit and they reached an invisible line in the sand that happened to be the Syrian border—which Daesh does not recognise—and our allies had to say, “Sorry, you’ve gone one foot over the border. We’re not going to do anything more.” This is about being part of a coalition. *[Interruption.]* It is ironic that I am being shouted at by Opposition Members for not doing enough. The present situation is an argument to do more, not less.

I want to talk about what a post-war Syria would look like. That is what the Vienna process is there for. It is a negotiated agreement to deliver a stable Government in Syria for the future. *[Interruption.]* I must say that I always love having—

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**Mr Speaker:** Order. Stop the clock. The hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) must be heard with courtesy. I say to one hon. Gentleman, whose loquacity has been notable today, that he is perfectly entitled to seek to intervene but he must not seek to deny the hon. Gentleman a courteous hearing. Let us be fair and decent to each other.

**Kevin Foster:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was about to say that it is always a pleasure to have an accompaniment.

Whatever comes out of the Vienna negotiations, the one solution that would be unacceptable is that Daesh should carry on to have a role in the future Government of Syria. Daesh will not be cleared out by warm words or by hopeful diplomacy. Part of the solution is a military intervention, and it is right that we should start to degrade Daesh now while we work to build up the coalition that will clear it out permanently. We cannot just say that this is too difficult.

##### 9.9 pm

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), and I thank him for his comments.

With the US adding manpower and Germany and China yesterday announcing they are joining Russia, France and Jordan to name but a few, we need today to enlist in the coalition of the civilised in the campaign against Daesh. It is still hard to fathom the utter brutality, the inhumanity and the sheer disregard for human life that Daesh shows. Today, we can join in the efforts to confine such evil to the history books and show we will not sit idly by while innocent people are beheaded, maimed, tortured, raped and massacred and fear is struck into the population.

The difference between ISIL’s so-called army and us is this: they behead and rape innocent people as if the only law is the law of the jungle. We know our enemy and we decide how to target them and when to target them through the democratic process—the decision of this House.

Sitting back has left us watching the situation spiralling further and further out of control, the law of the jungle prevailing and that jungle spreading. The time for restoring order and containment was over long ago. We have all seen that Islamic State is not happy to merely confine its horrendous caliphate to one nation or one corner of the globe. Of course, we all know by now the ultimate consequences of appeasement: terror and the threat of terror on the streets of Europe and beyond, a consequence we are only too aware of in Northern Ireland.

Yet today we still have the naysayers. They say intervention does not work. They say we will only make them hate us more. It is clear that they already hate us, regardless of whether we bomb them or not. There is no reasoning with these monsters. The naysayers say our involvement will only lead to civilian casualties, when the fact is civilians are dying en masse without our involvement. One thing is clear: there is not going to be an end to civilian casualties without an end to Daesh. The only way to stop civilian casualties is to eradicate the cause of such casualties: to take the battle to Raqqa and liberate that town, and to take the battle to those organising the attacks in Belgium, France and elsewhere in Europe, and take away their ability to earn money. It is time to blast a scar so deep into these jihadi monsters’

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memories that never again will they think of attacking a city, regardless of where Daesh may be conspiring and hiding.

Today this great country—this great democracy, this beacon of liberty through this House—the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will vote on whether to join the coalition of the civilised. Let us not be on the wrong side of history. Let us put Daesh out of business.

**9.12 pm**

**Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

Courageous Tornado crews based at RAF Marham in my county have been flying to Iraq already in the last year. The question today is whether we should ask them to do more, and my answer is yes. We have a clear, present and extreme threat and we have the ability to help defeat it.

I vote today in favour of diplomacy, of united resolve through the UN, of continued humanitarian leadership, of planning for stabilisation, reconstruction and peace in Syria, of cutting off the sources of finance, fighters and weapons, and of extending our advanced military capabilities in a fight that is already going on, in which we are already involved, and in which our enemies want us dead—a fight which we must win to keep British people safe both at home and abroad, and in which our allies need our help.

It is also right that the Government take domestic action, which is not necessarily named in this motion, but which goes with that coherent military, humanitarian and diplomatic action.

**Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP):** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Chloe Smith:** I will not give way; I want to proceed and there are a few other Members who have been waiting patiently and want to come in.

We all know we are under threat. No action is not an option. We all know there is history behind and there is risk ahead. People are naturally concerned that we may make things worse, and that being part of airstrikes may make us more of a target here in Britain. Those concerns are valid, but we can only hope to have a safer world for British children, and Syrian children too, by having the courage to defeat the evil that we face. Indeed, Syrians are already fleeing it, and desperately. We must act; the UN is asking us to act.

I am prepared to back UK action with all its risks because I want to protect civilians there, here and anywhere in the world from the greater and more certain threat they face from IS: the threat of death, repression and torture.

People rightly argue that it is not possible to bomb an ideology out of existence. That is true, which is why we need the breadth of the motion. We also need to ask what the alternative is. Is it to allow an ideology that recruits from its own military success so far to continue to do so, with a headquarters, and to invoke our silence in its cause? No, it is not. We must back the motion. My morals, my conscience and my heart and head say that it is Parliament’s duty to support the Government in the

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actions they must take to keep British citizens safe against that active ideological evil. It would be foolhardy to fail to take an action that may allow us to do our part.

**9.15 pm**

**Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab):** My close school friend James Adams was blown up on the Piccadilly line outside Russell Square on 7 July 2005. Five of my constituents—Anna Brandt, Ciaran Cassidy, Arthur Frederick, Lee Harris and Samantha Badham—also lost their lives.

Terrorism needs to be defeated, and the whole House comes together in that effort. The Prime Minister is right to say that bombing might degrade ISIL; I am with him on that. He is right to say that a coalition needs to come together to challenge the force of Daesh. He is also right to say that there are moderates on the ground who might support our efforts after the aerial bombing. However, having listened to the Prime Minister and to this debate, and having reflected on Turkey’s attack on the Russians, I have come to the conclusion that I am not able to support the Government tonight, for three reasons.

First, having looked into the eyes of so many young Muslim men who might be seduced by extremism, I am deeply concerned that there remains a vacuum, because there is not a sufficient number of Sunni moderates on the ground. I remember this House saying we would deal with al-Qaeda, but in doing so we made way for ISIL. Given that there are 65 disparate groups—many of which are jihadists—this will result in future extremists.

Much has been said about the Parisian bombings being an act of terror. Of course, they were an extreme act of terror, but they were also an act of holy war. They were bait for us and others to engage in that holy war. We must tread very, very gently over the coming days and months.

The Prime Minister could have come to this House and committed to ground troops, but I know that no one would want to put boots on the ground. We simply cannot continue to expect aerial bombardment to do the job. It has become the sop—the blanket—of the west. The truth is that civilians—cousins, brothers, sisters—will die and a new generation of extremists will come up from the vacuum. That is why, unfortunately, I am not prepared to put my name to the Government motion.

**9.18 pm**

**Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con):** Had I been a Member of this House in 2003, I too would have voted against the Iraq war, and had I been a Member at the time of the last vote on Syria, I would also have opposed the Government. I stand here today not as a warmonger or somebody who revels in military action, but as a pragmatist who has listened to, and been convinced by, what my Front Benchers have said, which is why I will support the Government this evening.

It would have been in the spirit of honest politics—indeed, it would have been far more honest—if the leader of the Labour party had come to this House, put up his hands and said, “I am a committed, long-standing pacifist of conviction,” instead of trying to hide behind

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artificial barriers and tests. His silence on the subject of our activity in Iraq, and the absence of any support from him for our military personnel there, spoke volumes—it was deafening, and the House heard it.

Last night, I spent a pleasant half-hour talking to four of the anti-war protesters outside this House: a taxi driver, a teacher, a charity worker and a tour guide. They asked me why I was voting in favour, and I shall tell Members why. This is not a war, it is a recalibration and extension of an existing operation. There are civilian casualties now, and we cannot sit idly by. We have to have an element of trust in those who can see the security documents and who are convinced by them. We also cannot rely continually on our security services to be 100% right, 100% of the time.

**Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a threat and a present danger to this country, and that it is only thanks to our security services that it has not been realised? We need to recognise that threat now.

**Simon Hoare:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, as are a number of Members on all sides of the House. I agree with the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) that there is no certainty in this. We have all come under a huge amount of pressure from constituents—90% of mine who have emailed me are opposed—but I rely on Edmund Burke, who said in 1774—*[Interruption.]* This is as true today as it was then—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Let us hear about what Burke said in 1774.

**Simon Hoare:** I am grateful, as long as I am not the Burke of 2015.

Burke said, “Your representative”—that is, one’s Member of Parliament—

“owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”

We are here to exercise our judgment, and in my judgment the wording of the motion covers all the bases, all the challenges and all the tests that Members of this House have set the Prime Minister.

We are not the policemen of the world, but we find nothing splendid in isolation. What we do reflects on our values, and the value we place on our strategic and political partners. “Je suis Parisien” has to be far more than just a Twitter tag. It is time for action.

**9.22 pm**

**Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP):** As a number of my hon. Friends have said tonight, this is the first time we have had to take such a serious decision, and it is not one that we take lightly. We do not ask whether we should tackle Daesh, but what the most effective means of doing so is.

**Drew Hendry:** Earlier, my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) talked about choking off Daesh propaganda. Does my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) agree that there has been a lack of discussion from the Government about how to choke off the money supply and the propaganda?

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**Stephen Gethins:** My hon. Friend raises a valid point, which was picked up in the Foreign Affairs Committee’s report. Before I touch on that, however, I want to say that when we think about how we vote tonight, we think about the lessons we have learned. We all do. I respect everybody in the House, regardless of the Lobby they go through tonight. We learn from the facts of Libya, and that we spent £320 million bombing the country and £25 million on reconstruction. We learn from the catastrophic failure of post-conflict reconstruction in Iraq, which led to the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, and to a political vacuum in that country that has led to many of the problems we see today.

It has been a privilege to sit on the Foreign Affairs Committee, and I pay particular credit to its Chairman, the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt). We will go through different Lobbies tonight, but I give him credit for his work. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), and I am sure that all Members will join me in wishing them a speedy recovery.

I hope you will not mind my saying, Mr Speaker, that those who have not yet read the Committee’s report have about half an hour. Perhaps they can skim-read it. I would thoroughly recommend it. It sets out a series of recommendation and is based on evidence.

**Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP):** According to the Prime Minister’s statement last week, the Government’s strategy is predicated on a new Syrian Government, but does my hon. Friend agree that given that the Prime Minister has ruled out regime change or boots on the ground, it is extremely unclear how that new Government will come about?

**Stephen Gethins:** We have not seen enough on the forward planning and the long-term planning, which is a cause for concern for me, as I know it is for other Members. We need ground troops, but we have not heard enough on how we have got them; where did the 70,000 come from? I raised this with the Foreign Secretary back in July, and this was something that we included—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman has the Floor. It would be a courtesy if he would respect my wish that two other colleagues briefly contribute. I feel sure that he is reaching his peroration, which will not last longer than 30 seconds or so.

**Stephen Gethins:** In that case, Mr Speaker, let me just touch on a couple of points. We are often accused of using the tactics of the past, and the criticism is made that we are fighting the last war, rather than a current war. We do not want to do that. I give credit to Members across this House when I say that we want the same thing: to put an end to Daesh for good. It is my view that taking the same old route of bombing without a long-term strategy will lead only to failure, which is why I will back the multi-party amendment tonight.

**9.25 pm**

**Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con):** It has been an absolute privilege to be a parliamentarian today, and to listen to fantastic contributions from across the entire House. Only a few weeks ago, one of Britain’s key allies was

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attacked by an unprecedented enemy. For centuries, Britain has taken a lead in helping to fight tyranny and promote democracy and freedom around the world, and we have a responsibility to support our allies. Daesh is the antithesis of everything we hold dear, and it must be stopped. Now is the time to stand firm against our enemies; we cannot delay any further, or we risk people being killed in our streets. I feel that those people who have contacted me to say that our streets are safer if we stay out of the conflict have heard only part of the explanation. Daesh will not think twice about slaughtering our citizens in the UK, as it believes our culture, our society and everything we believe in should be crushed. Even though we have no military intervention in Syria at the moment, Daesh will still threaten attacks on our country every single day.

Having followed this debate and listened to contributions from across this House, I am absolutely reassured about the need for airstrikes in Syria, especially as we have precision technology that will reduce the number of civilian casualties. Obviously, we cannot talk about the particular intelligence we have, but it is clear that Daesh’s headquarters in Raqqa are tweeting tens of thousands of messages a day, in dozens of different languages, and we absolutely need to stop that. When I am asked whether or not this proposed action will encourage Daesh to attack us, I say that it is absolutely clear that we need to take out its recruitment operations, which are promoting jihad around the world.

One of my key concerns was that we cut off the head of the ISIL snake, only for it to grow up elsewhere. To prevent that happening, we need to grow a very strong ground strategy. That cannot be rushed, but it also cannot be delayed. Daesh is looking at targets all the time, and the atrocities in Paris could just as easily have been in London. Daesh is dangerous, and we should start taking the fight to it.

I conclude, as I started, by saying that when one of our key allies has been attacked, our freedoms, liberties and beliefs are at risk. When women are raped, children killed, gay people thrown off roofs and Christians decapitated, can we seriously stand by and watch this atrocity happen from afar? We absolutely have to act now. We have a decent diplomatic solution and a strong international aid plan, and the opposition forces desperately need some respite from being attacked on two fronts. As I have clearly said, I will not shy away from calls for a stronger ground strategy, but that should be created while there is an aerial campaign in Syria. We cannot afford to risk our security as we wait, which is why I will vote in favour of military action this evening.

**Several hon. Members *rose—***

**Mr Speaker:** Lastly, and until 9.30 pm, I call Mr Clive Efford.

**9.28 pm**

**Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab):** I will not vote with the Government tonight, but I want to get it on the record that I unequivocally condemn those people who have been intimidating Members of this House over tonight’s vote. I know that hon. Members weigh these issues up very heavily, and whatever side of the argument they come from, I give them my full respect.

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I have not been convinced by the Government about the presence of 70,000 moderate Free Syrian Army forces on the ground; the Government have failed to make the case that they exist. Those forces are made up of a number of very disparate groups, some of several thousand soldiers, and some of just a few hundred.

Unfortunately, the Government have also failed to make the political case. One issue that they did not address was the treatment of the Sunni minority in Iraq, and that must be done. That will fundamentally undermine the future of Daesh more than any bombing campaign. A bombing campaign without troops on the ground will not be effective. The Government have completely failed to make the case, which is why I cannot support them tonight.

**9.30 pm**

**Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab):** Before I respond to the debate, I would like to say this directly to the Prime Minister: although my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and I will walk into different Division Lobbies tonight, I am proud to speak from the same Dispatch Box as him. He is not a terrorist sympathiser. He is an honest, principled, decent and good man, and I think the Prime Minister must now regret what he said yesterday and his failure to do what he should have done today, which is simply to say, “I am sorry.”

We have had an intense and impassioned debate, and rightly so given the clear and present threat from Daesh, the gravity of the decision that rests on the shoulders and the conscience of every single one of us, and the lives that we hold in our hands tonight. Whatever decision we reach, I hope that we will treat one another with respect.

We have heard a number of outstanding speeches. Sadly, time will prevent me from acknowledging them all. I would just like to single out the contributions, both for and against the motion, from my right hon. Friends the Members for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) and for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper); my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) and for Wakefield (Mary Creagh); my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden); my hon. Friends the Members for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood), for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood); the hon. Members for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), and for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat); the right hon. Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie); and the hon. Member for Wells (James Heappey).

The question that confronts us in a very complex conflict is, at its heart, very simple. What should we do with others to confront this threat to our citizens, our nation, other nations and the people who suffer under the cruel yoke of Daesh? The carnage in Paris brought home to us the clear and present danger that we face from Daesh. It could just as easily have been London, Glasgow, Leeds, or Birmingham and it could still be. I believe that we have a moral and practical duty to extend the action that we are already taking in Iraq to

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Syria. I am also clear—and I say this to my colleagues—that the conditions set out in the emergency resolution passed at the Labour party conference in September have been met. We now have a clear and unambiguous UN Security Council resolution 2249, paragraph 5 of which specifically calls on member states

“to take all necessary measures…to redouble and coordinate their efforts 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”.

The United Nations is asking us to do something; it is asking us to do something now; it is asking us to act in Syria as well as in Iraq.

**Mr Baron** *rose—*

**Hilary Benn:** If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, it was a Labour Government who helped to found the United Nations at the end of the second world war. Why did we do so? It was because we wanted the nations of the world working together to deal with threats to international peace and security, and Daesh is unquestionably that. Given that the United Nations has passed this resolution, and that such action would be lawful under article 51 of the UN charter—because every state has the right to defend itself—why would we not uphold the settled will of the United Nations, particularly when there is such support from within the region, including from Iraq? We are part of a coalition of more than 60 countries, standing together shoulder to shoulder to oppose the ideology and brutality of Daesh.

We all understand the importance of bringing an end to the Syrian civil war, and there is now some progress on a peace plan because of the Vienna talks. Those are our best hope of achieving a ceasefire—now that would bring an end to Assad’s bombing— leading to a transitional Government and elections. That is vital, both because it would help in the defeat of Daesh and because it would enable millions of Syrians who have been forced to flee to do what every refugee dreams of—they just want to be able to go home.

No one in the debate doubts the deadly serious threat that we face from Daesh and what it does, although we sometimes find it hard to live with the reality. In June, four gay men were thrown off the fifth storey of a building in the Syrian city of Deir ez-Zor. In August, the 82-year-old guardian of the antiquities of Palmyra, Professor Khaled al-Asaad, was beheaded, and his headless body was hung from a traffic light. In recent weeks, mass graves in Sinjar have been discovered, one said to contain the bodies of older Yazidi women murdered by Daesh because they were judged too old to be sold for sex. Daesh has killed 30 British tourists in Tunisia; 224 Russian holidaymakers on a plane; 178 people in suicide bombings in Beirut, Ankara and Suruç; 130 people in Paris, including those young people in the Bataclan, whom Daesh, in trying to justify its bloody slaughter, called apostates engaged in prostitution and vice. If it had happened here they could have been our children.

Daesh is plotting more attacks, so the question for each of us and for our national security is this: given that we know what it is doing, can we really stand aside and refuse to act fully in self-defence against those who are planning these attacks? Can we really leave to others the responsibility for defending our national security? If we do not act, what message will that send about our solidarity with those countries that have suffered so

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much, including Iraq and our ally, France? France wants us to stand with it, and President Hollande, the leader of our sister Socialist party, has asked for our assistance and help. As we are undertaking airstrikes in Iraq, where Daesh’s hold has been reduced, and as we are doing everything but engaging in airstrikes in Syria, should we not play our full part?

It has been argued in the debate that airstrikes achieve nothing. Not so: the House should look at how Daesh’s forward march has been halted in Iraq. It will remember that 14 months ago, people were saying that it was almost at the gates of Baghdad, which is why we voted to respond to the Iraqi Government’s request for help to defeat it. Its military capacity and freedom of movement have been put under pressure. Ask the Kurds about Sinjar and Kobane. Of course, airstrikes alone will not defeat Daesh, but they make a difference, because they give it a hard time, making it more difficult for it to expand its territory. I share the concerns that have been expressed this evening about potential civilian casualties. However, unlike Daesh, none of us today acts with the intent to harm civilians. Rather, we act to protect civilians from Daesh, which targets innocent people.

On the subject of ground troops to defeat Daesh, there has been much debate about the figure of 70,000, and the Government must explain that better. But we know that most of those troops are engaged in fighting President Assad. I will tell Members what else we know: whatever the number—70,000, 40,000, 80,000—the current size of the opposition forces means that the longer we leave it to take action, the longer Daesh will have to decrease that number. So to suggest that airstrikes should not take place until the Syrian civil war has come to an end is to miss the urgency of the terrorist threat that Daesh poses to us and others, and to misunderstand the nature and objectives of the extension to airstrikes that is proposed.

Of course we should take action—there is no contradiction between the two—to cut off Daesh’s support in the form of money, fighters and weapons, of course we should give humanitarian aid, of course we should offer shelter to more refugees, including in this country, and yes, we should commit to play our full part in helping to rebuild Syria when the war is over.

I accept that there are legitimate arguments, and we have heard them in the debate, for not taking this form of action now. It is also clear that many Members have wrestled and, who knows, in the time that is left may still be wrestling with their conscience about what is the right thing to do. But I say the threat is now and there are rarely, if ever, perfect circumstances in which to deploy military forces.

We heard powerful testimony earlier from the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) when she quoted that passage. Karwan Jamal Tahir, the Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative in London, said last week:

“Last June, Daesh captured one third of Iraq overnight and a few months later attacked the Kurdistan Region. Swift airstrikes by Britain, America and France and the actions of our own Peshmerga saved us... We now have a border of 650 miles with Daesh. We have pushed them back and recently captured Sinjar ...Again Western airstrikes were vital. But the old border between Iraq and Syria does not exist. Daesh fighters come and go across this fictional boundary.”

That is the argument for treating the two countries as one if we are serious about defeating Daesh.

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I hope the House will bear with me if I direct my closing remarks to my Labour friends and colleagues. As a party we have always been defined by our internationalism. We believe we have a responsibility one to another. We never have and we never should walk by on the other side of the road. We are faced by fascists—not just their calculated brutality, but their belief that they are superior to every single one of us in this Chamber tonight and all the people we represent. They hold us in contempt. They hold our values in contempt. They hold our belief in tolerance and decency in contempt. They hold our democracy—the means by which we will make our decision tonight—in contempt.

What we know about fascists is that they need to be defeated. It is why, as we have heard tonight, socialists, trade unionists and others joined the International Brigade in the 1930s to fight against Franco. It is why this entire House stood up against Hitler and Mussolini. It is why our party has always stood up against the denial of human rights and for justice. My view is that we must now confront this evil. It is now time for us to do our bit in Syria. That is why I ask my colleagues to vote for the motion tonight. *[Applause.]*

**9.44 pm**

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond):** I congratulate the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) on an outstanding exposition of the case for the motion. It will go down as one of the truly great speeches made in the House of Commons.

The proposal before the House is clear, simple and specific: to extend the airstrikes that we are already carrying out against ISIL in Iraq across a border that they themselves do not recognise and into their heartland in Syria. The Prime Minister set out the compelling arguments in favour of taking this action as part of a comprehensive strategy for Syria. In response, the Leader of the Opposition set out his well known and well understood principled objections to military intervention, objections that he has developed over many years and which are obviously sincerely held. I respect those objections as such, although I believe them to be profoundly misguided.

It is clear from the shadow Foreign Secretary’s speech, and from those of the right hon. Members for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) and many others, that for many Opposition Members the real issue of conscience at stake here is our obligation to act in the best interests of the UK and for the protection of British citizens.

For me, one of the most interesting aspects of the Leader of the Opposition’s speech was his repeated refusal to confirm whether it is his party’s policy to support the current action in Iraq, which this House voted for overwhelmingly in September 2014. Not only is he opposed to extending action to protect Britain against Daesh, but we have to assume from his silence that he wants to roll back the action that we are taking in Iraq now to protect the Kurds, the Yazidis and others and to support the steady erosion of ISIL control by the Iraqi security forces and the peshmerga. I ask Opposition Members whether that is now the position of the Labour party, despite its long and honourable tradition of fighting what the right hon. Member for Leeds Central has himself described as fascism. I hope

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that we will have confirmation as soon as possible that the Labour party remains committed to the current action in Iraq.

**Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con):** Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

**Mr Hammond:** I will not give way, because time is very short.

I believe that today we saw the House at its best. A total of 104 Members have spoken. We heard forensic analysis and passionate conviction. I think that we can collectively be satisfied that, as a House, we have done justice to the gravity of the subject. With so many contributions and only a few minutes remaining, I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will forgive me if I do not acknowledge them all individually, but I will do my best to try to address the principal themes and questions that have arisen during the debate.

One of the key issues is the need to understand what the military plan is and who will deliver it. I have to say that there appears to be some confusion about that, so let me try to clarify it. We all agree that airstrikes alone will not finish ISIL, but they will deliver immediate benefit. They will reduce ISIL’s external attack planning capability, making Britain safer, and they will, over time, degrade ISIL and force a change in its behaviour. However, airstrikes alone will not create a vacuum.

During the debate, some hon. Members have sought to have it both ways, arguing that bombing ISIL in Raqqa will not make a difference, and at the same time suggesting that bombing ISIL in Raqqa will immediately create a power vacuum. Ultimately, there will need to be a ground assault on Raqqa, supported by continued airstrikes. However, as the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) said, that will come not in days or weeks, but in months and perhaps years, and that is before it even begins, let alone ends. We have had questions about ground forces—where are the ground forces going to come from? The context of this is a comprehensive strategy—a military track against ISIL and a political track against Assad. The time for retaking ISIL’s heartland in Syria will be when the civil war is ended, a transitional Government are in place, and the world can then once again support the Syrian Government so that that Syrian army, the Syrian opposition forces and the Kurdish forces can turn their guns on ISIL, liberating their own country from this evil organisation, supported by the coalition with weapons, with training, with technical support, and with air power.

Much has been made during the course of this debate about the number of opposition fighters available to join in that effort. The number of 70,000 is a number produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee. It is a number corroborated by the evidence of our US allies. But the situation on the ground is complex. There is a spectrum of views included in that 70,000-strong force. Yes, it includes a large element of secularists who have views that we would recognise as democratic, and yes, it also includes Islamists, but there are Islamists in the parliaments of Kuwait and Tunisia. We can work with Islamists who accept the democratic process and are prepared to take part in it.

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The second issue that has arisen during the course of this debate is a question about the overall strategy. The Prime Minister was absolutely clear that military action is just one part of a comprehensive strategy. There has to be a political track and there has to be a humanitarian track. It is clear that we have to pursue the political track in parallel with the military. It is the only way to end the civil war in Syria and bring about the defeat of ISIL. Now we have an international Syria support group—the Vienna process. That is a major change in the context here, bringing together all the major international players behind a common vision of what is needed to end the war. It includes Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as the US, UK, France, Turkey and China. For the first time, all these countries have accepted the need for Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political transition based on the Geneva principles—a transition that will leave the institutions of the state intact, avoiding the mistakes that were made in Iraq. Of course differences remain between the parties, particularly about Assad how will transition out, but they have agreed together a time frame for political negotiations, including transitional government within six months and a new constitution and free and fair elections within 18 months.

I know that there are those who question the commitment of the United States or the engagement of Russia in this process, so I want, if I may, to quote from a letter that I have received this morning from the United States Secretary of State, John Kerry. He says:

“The United States has long believed that while military action can reinforce diplomacy there can be no military solution to the civil war in Syria. We have to pursue a political track. And at the same time there can be no political deal with Daesh. They have to be degraded by military force.”

He goes on to say that

“the Vienna process presents the best opportunity in four years for an agreement that can establish a ceasefire and create a political process leading to a new constitution and democratic elections.”

Importantly, he concludes by telling me this:

“Senior Russian officials have helped lead the effort to find a common way forward and have expressed firm commitment to the Geneva principles. Russian leaders have indicated both publicly and privately on numerous occasions that they are open to a political transition, including a new constitution and elections.”

The third issue that came up several times during the course of today is the question of whether airstrikes will make a difference. The right hon. Member for Leeds Central and several other Members made the point that they were effective in halting the precipitate advance of Daesh in Iraq last year and are now contributing to the erosion of Daesh positions in Iran. The UK already provides a significant element of the high-precision strike available to the coalition, and that high-precision strike will be vital to the campaign in Raqqa.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) asked about the rules of engagement. Rules of engagement are classified, but I can tell him that the UK’s rules of engagement are among the most restrictive in the world. Bringing British discipline, British skills and British precision weapons to bear will save lives as we prosecute this campaign. We will minimise civilian casualties. There is no military logic and no moral logic to prosecuting ISIL in Iraq but not targeting its HQ in Syria.

Finally, I want to turn to the fourth issue that has arisen during the course of this debate: will Britain’s taking part in airstrikes increase the threat to our security?

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In 2014, there were 15 ISIL external attack plans. This year, so far, there have been 150. The scale of this problem is rising exponentially. ISIL already poses a direct threat to the United Kingdom: 30 British tourists killed on the beaches of Tunisia, what could have been a British plane downed over the deserts of Sinai and seven different terrorist plots disrupted by the security services in the UK in the past 12 months.

The judgment of the Joint Intelligence Committee and the director general of the Security Service is that the UK is already a top tier of ISIL’s target list. They hate us for who we are, not for what we do. We have to be clear—I think the right hon. Member for Derby South was the first to say this—that the risks of inaction are far greater than the risks of action. We have to act now to degrade this threat to our security, and we will do it by targeting their heartland and their control centre.

We are not debating tonight, as some would have us believe, whether or not to “go to war”. Fifteen months ago, this House voted overwhelmingly to begin airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq. The simple question that we are deciding tonight is whether to extend those operations to tackle ISIL in their heartland in Syria—targeting the head of the snake. This is not a fight that we have chosen. By the atrocities they have committed, by the murderous regime of brutality and terror they have inflicted on the people of Iraq and Syria, and by their clear intent and capability to strike us in the UK and at British citizens abroad, ISIL have made that choice for us. To answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), yes, ISIL do represent a direct and imminent threat to the UK and to British citizens.

The decision tonight is this: do we take the fight to them, or do we wait for them to bring the fight to us? Do we strike them in Syria, or do we wait for them to strike us on the streets of London? What kind of country would we be if we refused to act in the face of a threat to our security as clear as the one that ISIL poses? Indeed, what kind of country would we be if we were unmoved by the murder, the rape, the beheadings and the slavery that ISIL imposes on its subjects? And what kind of country would we be if we ignored the calls for help from our nearest neighbours even as they grieve for their dead? We cannot contract out the responsibility for our national security. We cannot rely on others to take actions to protect our citizens that we are not willing to take ourselves.

The threat is clear. Our ability to respond to it is undoubted. The moral imperative to act is compelling. The legal case to do so is watertight. We do not propose military action lightly and we do not propose it in isolation. We will vigorously pursue the Vienna process to ceasefire, transition and a new representative Government in Syria. We will lead the international community in planning and delivering post-conflict reconstruction. Let us tonight give a clear and simple message to our allies, to the enemy and to our brave armed forces, who we are asking to do the job for us. Let us show beyond doubt what kind of a country we are by endorsing decisively the motion before us this evening.

**10 pm**

*The Speaker put the Questions necessary for the disposal of business to be concluded at that time (Order this day).*

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*Amendment proposed:*(b), leave out from ‘That this House’ to end and add

‘, while welcoming the renewed impetus towards peace and reconstruction in Syria, and the Government’s recognition that a comprehensive strategy against Daesh is required, does not believe that the case for the UK’s participation in the ongoing air campaign in Syria by 10 countries has been made under current circumstances, and consequently declines to authorise military action in Syria.’. *—(Mr Baron.)*

*Question put,*That the amendment be made.

*The House divided:*

Ayes 211, Noes 390.

**Division No. 138]**

**[**

**10 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane

Abrahams, Debbie

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina

Ali, Rushanara

Allen, Mr Graham

Anderson, Mr David

Arkless, Richard

Bardell, Hannah

Baron, Mr John

Betts, Mr Clive

Black, Mhairi

Blackford, Ian

Blackman, Kirsty

Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta

Blomfield, Paul

Boswell, Philip

Brennan, Kevin

Brock, Deidre

Brown, Alan

Brown, Lyn

Brown, rh Mr Nicholas

Buck, Ms Karen

Burden, Richard

Burgon, Richard

Burnham, rh Andy

Butler, Dawn

Cameron, Dr Lisa

Campbell, Mr Ronnie

Champion, Sarah

Chapman, Douglas

Cherry, Joanna

Cooper, Julie

Corbyn, rh Jeremy

Cowan, Ronnie

Crausby, Mr David

Crawley, Angela

Cruddas, Jon

Cryer, John

Cunningham, Alex

Cunningham, Mr Jim

Dakin, Nic

Davies, Geraint

Davis, rh Mr David

Day, Martyn

Docherty, Martin John

Donaldson, Stuart Blair

Dowd, Peter

Dromey, Jack

Durkan, Mark

Efford, Clive

Esterson, Bill

Evans, Chris

Farrelly, Paul

Fellows, Marion

Ferrier, Margaret

Flello, Robert

Flynn, Paul

Fovargue, Yvonne

Foxcroft, Vicky

Gardiner, Barry

Gethins, Stephen

Gibson, Patricia

Glass, Pat

Glindon, Mary

Godsiff, Mr Roger

Grady, Patrick

Grant, Peter

Gray, Neil

Green, Kate

Greenwood, Lilian

Greenwood, Margaret

Griffith, Nia

Gwynne, Andrew

Haigh, Louise

Hamilton, Fabian

Hanson, rh Mr David

Harpham, Harry

Harris, Carolyn

Hayes, Helen

Hayman, Sue

Healey, rh John

Hendrick, Mr Mark

Hendry, Drew

Hepburn, Mr Stephen

Hillier, Meg

Hodgson, Mrs Sharon

Hoey, Kate

Hollern, Kate

Hollobone, Mr Philip

Hopkins, Kelvin

Hosie, Stewart

Huq, Dr Rupa

Hussain, Imran

Irranca-Davies, Huw

Jones, Gerald

Kane, Mike

Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald

Keeley, Barbara

Kerevan, George

Kerr, Calum

Khan, rh Sadiq

Kinnock, Stephen

Lamb, rh Norman

Lammy, rh Mr David

Lavery, Ian

Law, Chris

Leigh, Sir Edward

Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma

Lewis, Clive

Lewis, rh Dr Julian

Long Bailey, Rebecca

Lucas, Caroline

Lucas, Ian C.

MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan

Mactaggart, rh Fiona

Madders, Justin

Mahmood, Shabana

Malhotra, Seema

Mann, John

Marris, Rob

Marsden, Mr Gordon

Maskell, Rachael

Matheson, Christian

Mc Nally, John

McCabe, Steve

McCaig, Callum

McDonald, Andy

McDonald, Stewart Malcolm

McDonald, Stuart C.

McDonnell, Dr Alasdair

McDonnell, John

McGarry, Natalie

McInnes, Liz

McKinnell, Catherine

McLaughlin, Anne

McPartland, Stephen

Meale, Sir Alan

Mearns, Ian

Miliband, rh Edward

Monaghan, Carol

Monaghan, Dr Paul

Moon, Mrs Madeleine

Morden, Jessica

Morris, Grahame M.

Mullin, Roger

Murray, Ian

Nandy, Lisa

Newlands, Gavin

Nicolson, John

O'Hara, Brendan

Onwurah, Chi

Osamor, Kate

Oswald, Kirsten

Owen, Albert

Paterson, Steven

Pearce, Teresa

Pennycook, Matthew

Perkins, Toby

Pound, Stephen

Qureshi, Yasmin

Rayner, Angela

Rees, Christina

Reynolds, Jonathan

Rimmer, Marie

Ritchie, Ms Margaret

Robertson, rh Angus

Rotheram, Steve

Salmond, rh Alex

Saville Roberts, Liz

Shah, Naz

Sheerman, Mr Barry

Sheppard, Tommy

Sherriff, Paula

Shuker, Mr Gavin

Skinner, Mr Dennis

Slaughter, Andy

Smith, rh Mr Andrew

Smith, Cat

Smith, Jeff

Smith, Nick

Smith, Owen

Starmer, Keir

Stephens, Chris

Stevens, Jo

Streeting, Wes

Stringer, Graham

Tami, Mark

Thewliss, Alison

Thomas-Symonds, Nick

Thomson, Michelle

Thornberry, Emily

Timms, rh Stephen

Trickett, Jon

Turner, Mr Andrew

Turner, Karl

Twigg, Stephen

Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew

Vaz, Valerie

Vickers, Martin

Weir, Mike

West, Catherine

Whiteford, Dr Eilidh

Whitehead, Dr Alan

Whitford, Dr Philippa

Williams, Hywel

Williams, Mr Mark

Wilson, Corri

Winnick, Mr David

Wishart, Pete

Wright, Mr Iain

Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

Owen Thompson

**and**

Jonathan Edwards

**NOES**

Adams, Nigel

Afriyie, Adam

Aldous, Peter

Alexander, Heidi

Allan, Lucy

Allen, Heidi

Amess, Sir David

Andrew, Stuart

Ansell, Caroline

Argar, Edward

Atkins, Victoria

Austin, Ian

Bacon, Mr Richard

Bailey, Mr Adrian

Baker, Mr Steve

Baldwin, Harriett

Barclay, Stephen

Barron, rh Kevin

Bebb, Guto

Beckett, rh Margaret

Bellingham, Mr Henry

Benn, rh Hilary

Benyon, Richard

Beresford, Sir Paul

Berry, Jake

Berry, James

Bingham, Andrew

Blackman, Bob

Blackwood, Nicola

Blenkinsop, Tom

Blunt, Crispin

Boles, Nick

Bone, Mr Peter

Borwick, Victoria

Bottomley, Sir Peter

Bradley, Karen

Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben

Brady, Mr Graham

Brake, rh Tom

Brazier, Mr Julian

Bridgen, Andrew

Brine, Steve

Brokenshire, rh James

Bruce, Fiona

Bryant, Chris

Buckland, Robert

Burns, Conor

Burns, rh Sir Simon

Burrowes, Mr David

Burt, rh Alistair

Cairns, Alun

Cameron, rh Mr David

Campbell, rh Mr Alan

Campbell, Mr Gregory

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair

Carmichael, Neil

Carswell, Mr Douglas

Cartlidge, James

Cash, Sir William

Caulfield, Maria

Chalk, Alex

Chapman, Jenny

Chishti, Rehman

Churchill, Jo

Clark, rh Greg

Clegg, rh Mr Nick

Cleverly, James

Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey

Coaker, Vernon

Coffey, Ann

Coffey, Dr Thérèse

Collins, Damian

Colvile, Oliver

Cooper, rh Yvette

Costa, Alberto

Cox, Mr Geoffrey

Coyle, Neil

Crabb, rh Stephen

Creagh, Mary

Crouch, Tracey

David, Wayne

Davies, Byron

Davies, Chris

Davies, David T. C.

Davies, Glyn

Davies, Dr James

Davies, Mims

Davies, Philip

Dinenage, Caroline

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan

Dodds, rh Mr Nigel

Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.

Donelan, Michelle

Dorries, Nadine

Double, Steve

Doughty, Stephen

Dowd, Jim

Dowden, Oliver

Drax, Richard

Drummond, Mrs Flick

Duddridge, James

Dugher, Michael

Duncan, rh Sir Alan

Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain

Dunne, Mr Philip

Eagle, Ms Angela

Eagle, Maria

Elliott, Tom

Ellis, Michael

Ellison, Jane

Ellman, Mrs Louise

Ellwood, Mr Tobias

Elphicke, Charlie

Eustice, George

Evans, Graham

Evans, Mr Nigel

Evennett, rh Mr David

Fabricant, Michael

Fallon, rh Michael

Farron, Tim

Fernandes, Suella

Field, rh Frank

Field, rh Mark

Fitzpatrick, Jim

Flint, rh Caroline

Foster, Kevin

Fox, rh Dr Liam

Francois, rh Mr Mark

Frazer, Lucy

Freeman, George

Freer, Mike

Fuller, Richard

Fysh, Marcus

Gale, Sir Roger

Garnier, rh Sir Edward

Garnier, Mark

Gauke, Mr David

Ghani, Nusrat

Gibb, Mr Nick

Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl

Glen, John

Goldsmith, Zac

Goodwill, Mr Robert

Gove, rh Michael

Graham, Richard

Grant, Mrs Helen

Gray, Mr James

Grayling, rh Chris

Green, Chris

Green, rh Damian

Greening, rh Justine

Grieve, rh Mr Dominic

Griffiths, Andrew

Gummer, Ben

Gyimah, Mr Sam

Halfon, rh Robert

Hall, Luke

Hammond, rh Mr Philip

Hammond, Stephen

Hancock, rh Matthew

Hands, rh Greg

Harman, rh Ms Harriet

Harper, rh Mr Mark

Harrington, Richard

Harris, Rebecca

Hart, Simon

Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan

Hayes, rh Mr John

Heald, Sir Oliver

Heappey, James

Heaton-Harris, Chris

Heaton-Jones, Peter

Henderson, Gordon

Herbert, rh Nick

Hermon, Lady

Hinds, Damian

Hoare, Simon

Hodge, rh Dame Margaret

Hollingbery, George

Hollinrake, Kevin

Hopkins, Kris

Howarth, rh Mr George

Howarth, Sir Gerald

Howell, John

Howlett, Ben

Huddleston, Nigel

Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy

Hunt, Tristram

Hurd, Mr Nick

Jackson, Mr Stewart

James, Margot

Jarvis, Dan

Javid, rh Sajid

Jayawardena, Mr Ranil

Jenkin, Mr Bernard

Jenkyns, Andrea

Jenrick, Robert

Johnson, rh Alan

Johnson, Boris

Johnson, Gareth

Johnson, Joseph

Jones, Andrew

Jones, rh Mr David

Jones, Graham

Jones, Helen

Jones, Mr Kevan

Jones, Mr Marcus

Jones, Susan Elan

Kawczynski, Daniel

Kendall, Liz

Kennedy, Seema

Kinahan, Danny

Kirby, Simon

Knight, rh Sir Greg

Knight, Julian

Kwarteng, Kwasi

Kyle, Peter

Lancaster, Mark

Latham, Pauline

Leadsom, Andrea

Lee, Dr Phillip

Lefroy, Jeremy

Leslie, Charlotte

Leslie, Chris

Letwin, rh Mr Oliver

Lewis, Brandon

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian

Lidington, rh Mr David

Lilley, rh Mr Peter

Lopresti, Jack

Lord, Jonathan

Loughton, Tim

Lumley, Karen

Mackinlay, Craig

Mackintosh, David

Main, Mrs Anne

Mak, Mr Alan

Malthouse, Kit

Mann, Scott

Mathias, Dr Tania

May, rh Mrs Theresa

Maynard, Paul

McCartney, Jason

McCartney, Karl

McDonagh, Siobhain

McFadden, rh Mr Pat

McGinn, Conor

McGovern, Alison

McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick

Menzies, Mark

Mercer, Johnny

Merriman, Huw

Metcalfe, Stephen

Miller, rh Mrs Maria

Milling, Amanda

Mills, Nigel

Milton, rh Anne

Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew

Mordaunt, Penny

Morgan, rh Nicky

Morris, Anne Marie

Morris, David

Morris, James

Morton, Wendy

Mowat, David

Mulholland, Greg

Mundell, rh David

Murray, Mrs Sheryll

Murrison, Dr Andrew

Neill, Robert

Newton, Sarah

Nokes, Caroline

Norman, Jesse

Nuttall, Mr David

Offord, Dr Matthew

Opperman, Guy

Osborne, rh Mr George

Paisley, Ian

Parish, Neil

Patel, rh Priti

Paterson, rh Mr Owen

Pawsey, Mark

Penning, rh Mike

Penrose, John

Percy, Andrew

Perry, Claire

Phillips, Stephen

Phillipson, Bridget

Philp, Chris

Pickles, rh Sir Eric

Pincher, Christopher

Poulter, Dr Daniel

Pow, Rebecca

Prentis, Victoria

Prisk, Mr Mark

Pritchard, Mark

Pugh, John

Pursglove, Tom

Quin, Jeremy

Quince, Will

Raab, Mr Dominic

Redwood, rh John

Reed, Mr Jamie

Reed, Mr Steve

Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob

Reynolds, Emma

Robertson, Mr Laurence

Robinson, Gavin

Robinson, Mary

Rosindell, Andrew

Rudd, rh Amber

Rutley, David

Ryan, rh Joan

Sandbach, Antoinette

Scully, Paul

Selous, Andrew

Shannon, Jim

Shapps, rh Grant

Sharma, Alok

Shelbrooke, Alec

Simpson, David

Simpson, rh Mr Keith

Skidmore, Chris

Smeeth, Ruth

Smith, Angela

Smith, Chloe

Smith, Henry

Smith, Julian

Smith, Royston

Soames, rh Sir Nicholas

Solloway, Amanda

Soubry, rh Anna

Spellar, rh Mr John

Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline

Spencer, Mark

Stephenson, Andrew

Stevenson, John

Stewart, Bob

Stewart, Iain

Stewart, Rory

Streeter, Mr Gary

Stride, Mel

Stuart, rh Ms Gisela

Stuart, Graham

Sturdy, Julian

Sunak, Rishi

Swayne, rh Mr Desmond

Swire, rh Mr Hugo

Syms, Mr Robert

Thomas, Derek

Thomas, Mr Gareth

Throup, Maggie

Timpson, Edward

Tolhurst, Kelly

Tomlinson, Justin

Tomlinson, Michael

Tracey, Craig

Tredinnick, David

Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie

Truss, rh Elizabeth

Tugendhat, Tom

Turley, Anna

Umunna, Mr Chuka

Vaizey, Mr Edward

Vara, Mr Shailesh

Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa

Walker, Mr Charles

Walker, Mr Robin

Wallace, Mr Ben

Warburton, David

Warman, Matt

Watkinson, Dame Angela

Wharton, James

Whately, Helen

Wheeler, Heather

White, Chris

Whittaker, Craig

Whittingdale, rh Mr John

Wiggin, Bill

Williams, Craig

Williamson, rh Gavin

Wilson, Phil

Wilson, Mr Rob

Wilson, Sammy

Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Wood, Mike

Woodcock, John

Wragg, William

Wright, rh Jeremy

Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**

Gavin Barwell

**and**

Jackie Doyle-Price

*Question accordingly negatived.*

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**2 Dec 2015 : Column 492**

**2 Dec 2015 : Column 493**

**2 Dec 2015 : Column 494**

*Main Question put.*

*The House divided:*

Ayes 397, Noes 223.

**Division No. 139]**

**[**

**10.15 pm**

**AYES**

Adams, Nigel

Afriyie, Adam

Aldous, Peter

Alexander, Heidi

Allan, Lucy

Allen, Heidi

Amess, Sir David

Andrew, Stuart

Ansell, Caroline

Argar, Edward

Atkins, Victoria

Austin, Ian

Bacon, Mr Richard

Bailey, Mr Adrian

Baker, Mr Steve

Baldwin, Harriett

Barclay, Stephen

Barron, rh Kevin

Bebb, Guto

Beckett, rh Margaret

Bellingham, Mr Henry

Benn, rh Hilary

Benyon, Richard

Beresford, Sir Paul

Berger, Luciana

Berry, Jake

Berry, James

Bingham, Andrew

Blackman, Bob

Blackwood, Nicola

Blenkinsop, Tom

Blunt, Crispin

Boles, Nick

Bone, Mr Peter

Borwick, Victoria

Bottomley, Sir Peter

Bradley, Karen

Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben

Brady, Mr Graham

Brake, rh Tom

Brazier, Mr Julian

Bridgen, Andrew

Brine, Steve

Brokenshire, rh James

Bruce, Fiona

Bryant, Chris

Buckland, Robert

Burns, Conor

Burns, rh Sir Simon

Burrowes, Mr David

Burt, rh Alistair

Cairns, Alun

Cameron, rh Mr David

Campbell, rh Mr Alan

Campbell, Mr Gregory

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair

Carmichael, Neil

Carswell, Mr Douglas

Cartlidge, James

Cash, Sir William

Caulfield, Maria

Chalk, Alex

Chapman, Jenny

Chishti, Rehman

Churchill, Jo

Clark, rh Greg

Clegg, rh Mr Nick

Cleverly, James

Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey

Coaker, Vernon

Coffey, Ann

Coffey, Dr Thérèse

Collins, Damian

Colvile, Oliver

Cooper, rh Yvette

Costa, Alberto

Cox, Mr Geoffrey

Coyle, Neil

Crabb, rh Stephen

Creagh, Mary

Creasy, Stella

Crouch, Tracey

Danczuk, Simon

David, Wayne

Davies, Byron

Davies, Chris

Davies, David T. C.

Davies, Glyn

Davies, Dr James

Davies, Mims

Davies, Philip

De Piero, Gloria

Dinenage, Caroline

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan

Dodds, rh Mr Nigel

Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.

Donelan, Michelle

Dorries, Nadine

Double, Steve

Doughty, Stephen

Dowd, Jim

Dowden, Oliver

Drax, Richard

Drummond, Mrs Flick

Duddridge, James

Dugher, Michael

Duncan, rh Sir Alan

Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain

Dunne, Mr Philip

Eagle, Ms Angela

Eagle, Maria

Elliott, Tom

Ellis, Michael

Ellison, Jane

Ellman, Mrs Louise

Ellwood, Mr Tobias

Elphicke, Charlie

Eustice, George

Evans, Graham

Evans, Mr Nigel

Evennett, rh Mr David

Fabricant, Michael

Fallon, rh Michael

Farron, Tim

Fernandes, Suella

Field, rh Frank

Field, rh Mark

Fitzpatrick, Jim

Fletcher, Colleen

Flint, rh Caroline

Foster, Kevin

Fox, rh Dr Liam

Francois, rh Mr Mark

Frazer, Lucy

Freeman, George

Freer, Mike

Fuller, Richard

Fysh, Marcus

Gale, Sir Roger

Garnier, rh Sir Edward

Garnier, Mark

Gauke, Mr David

Ghani, Nusrat

Gibb, Mr Nick

Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl

Glen, John

Goldsmith, Zac

Goodwill, Mr Robert

Gove, rh Michael

Graham, Richard

Grant, Mrs Helen

Gray, Mr James

Grayling, rh Chris

Green, Chris

Green, rh Damian

Greening, rh Justine

Grieve, rh Mr Dominic

Griffiths, Andrew

Gummer, Ben

Gyimah, Mr Sam

Halfon, rh Robert

Hall, Luke

Hammond, rh Mr Philip

Hammond, Stephen

Hancock, rh Matthew

Hands, rh Greg

Harman, rh Ms Harriet

Harper, rh Mr Mark

Harrington, Richard

Harris, Rebecca

Hart, Simon

Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan

Hayes, rh Mr John

Heald, Sir Oliver

Heappey, James

Heaton-Harris, Chris

Heaton-Jones, Peter

Herbert, rh Nick

Hermon, Lady

Hinds, Damian

Hoare, Simon

Hodge, rh Dame Margaret

Hollingbery, George

Hollinrake, Kevin

Hopkins, Kris

Howarth, rh Mr George

Howarth, Sir Gerald

Howell, John

Howlett, Ben

Huddleston, Nigel

Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy

Hunt, Tristram

Hurd, Mr Nick

Jackson, Mr Stewart

James, Margot

Jarvis, Dan

Javid, rh Sajid

Jayawardena, Mr Ranil

Jenkin, Mr Bernard

Jenkyns, Andrea

Jenrick, Robert

Johnson, rh Alan

Johnson, Boris

Johnson, Gareth

Johnson, Joseph

Jones, Andrew

Jones, rh Mr David

Jones, Graham

Jones, Helen

Jones, Mr Kevan

Jones, Mr Marcus

Jones, Susan Elan

Kawczynski, Daniel

Kendall, Liz

Kennedy, Seema

Kinahan, Danny

Kirby, Simon

Knight, rh Sir Greg

Knight, Julian

Kwarteng, Kwasi

Kyle, Peter

Lancaster, Mark

Latham, Pauline

Leadsom, Andrea

Lee, Dr Phillip

Lefroy, Jeremy

Leslie, Charlotte

Leslie, Chris

Letwin, rh Mr Oliver

Lewis, Brandon

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian

Lidington, rh Mr David

Lilley, rh Mr Peter

Lopresti, Jack

Lord, Jonathan

Loughton, Tim

Lumley, Karen

Lynch, Holly

Mackinlay, Craig

Mackintosh, David

Main, Mrs Anne

Mak, Mr Alan

Malthouse, Kit

Mann, Scott

Mathias, Dr Tania

May, rh Mrs Theresa

Maynard, Paul

McCartney, Jason

McCartney, Karl

McDonagh, Siobhain

McFadden, rh Mr Pat

McGinn, Conor

McGovern, Alison

McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick

Menzies, Mark

Mercer, Johnny

Merriman, Huw

Metcalfe, Stephen

Miller, rh Mrs Maria

Milling, Amanda

Mills, Nigel

Milton, rh Anne

Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew

Mordaunt, Penny

Morgan, rh Nicky

Morris, Anne Marie

Morris, David

Morris, James

Morton, Wendy

Mowat, David

Mulholland, Greg

Mundell, rh David

Murray, Mrs Sheryll

Murrison, Dr Andrew

Neill, Robert

Newton, Sarah

Nokes, Caroline

Norman, Jesse

Nuttall, Mr David

Offord, Dr Matthew

Opperman, Guy

Osborne, rh Mr George

Paisley, Ian

Parish, Neil

Patel, rh Priti

Paterson, rh Mr Owen

Pawsey, Mark

Penning, rh Mike

Penrose, John

Percy, Andrew

Perry, Claire

Phillips, Stephen

Phillipson, Bridget

Philp, Chris

Pickles, rh Sir Eric

Pincher, Christopher

Poulter, Dr Daniel

Pow, Rebecca

Powell, Lucy

Prentis, Victoria

Prisk, Mr Mark

Pritchard, Mark

Pugh, John

Pursglove, Tom

Quin, Jeremy

Quince, Will

Raab, Mr Dominic

Reed, Mr Jamie

Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob

Reynolds, Emma

Robertson, Mr Laurence

Robinson, Gavin

Robinson, Mr Geoffrey

Robinson, Mary

Rosindell, Andrew

Rudd, rh Amber

Rutley, David

Ryan, rh Joan

Sandbach, Antoinette

Scully, Paul

Selous, Andrew

Shannon, Jim

Shapps, rh Grant

Sharma, Alok

Shelbrooke, Alec

Simpson, David

Simpson, rh Mr Keith

Skidmore, Chris

Smeeth, Ruth

Smith, Angela

Smith, Chloe

Smith, Henry

Smith, Julian

Smith, Royston

Soames, rh Sir Nicholas

Solloway, Amanda

Soubry, rh Anna

Spellar, rh Mr John

Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline

Spencer, Mark

Stephenson, Andrew

Stevenson, John

Stewart, Bob

Stewart, Iain

Stewart, Rory

Streeter, Mr Gary

Stride, Mel

Stuart, rh Ms Gisela

Stuart, Graham

Sturdy, Julian

Sunak, Rishi

Swayne, rh Mr Desmond

Swire, rh Mr Hugo

Syms, Mr Robert

Thomas, Derek

Thomas, Mr Gareth

Throup, Maggie

Timpson, Edward

Tolhurst, Kelly

Tomlinson, Justin

Tomlinson, Michael

Tracey, Craig

Tredinnick, David

Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie

Truss, rh Elizabeth

Tugendhat, Tom

Turley, Anna

Umunna, Mr Chuka

Vaizey, Mr Edward

Vara, Mr Shailesh

Vaz, rh Keith

Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa

Walker, Mr Charles

Walker, Mr Robin

Wallace, Mr Ben

Warburton, David

Warman, Matt

Watkinson, Dame Angela

Watson, Mr Tom

Wharton, James

Whately, Helen

Wheeler, Heather

White, Chris

Whittaker, Craig

Whittingdale, rh Mr John

Wiggin, Bill

Williams, Craig

Williamson, rh Gavin

Wilson, Phil

Wilson, Mr Rob

Wilson, Sammy

Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Wood, Mike

Woodcock, John

Wragg, William

Wright, rh Jeremy

Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

Gavin Barwell

**and**

Jackie Doyle-Price

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane

Abrahams, Debbie

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina

Ali, Rushanara

Allen, Mr Graham

Anderson, Mr David

Arkless, Richard

Ashworth, Jonathan

Bardell, Hannah

Baron, Mr John

Betts, Mr Clive

Black, Mhairi

Blackford, Ian

Blackman, Kirsty

Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta

Blomfield, Paul

Boswell, Philip

Brennan, Kevin

Brock, Deidre

Brown, Alan

Brown, Lyn

Brown, rh Mr Nicholas

Buck, Ms Karen

Burden, Richard

Burgon, Richard

Burnham, rh Andy

Butler, Dawn

Byrne, rh Liam

Cadbury, Ruth

Cameron, Dr Lisa

Campbell, Mr Ronnie

Champion, Sarah

Chapman, Douglas

Cherry, Joanna

Cooper, Julie

Corbyn, rh Jeremy

Cowan, Ronnie

Crausby, Mr David

Crawley, Angela

Cruddas, Jon

Cryer, John

Cummins, Judith

Cunningham, Alex

Cunningham, Mr Jim

Dakin, Nic

Davies, Geraint

Davis, rh Mr David

Day, Martyn

Docherty, Martin John

Donaldson, Stuart Blair

Dowd, Peter

Dromey, Jack

Durkan, Mark

Edwards, Jonathan

Efford, Clive

Elliott, Julie

Esterson, Bill

Evans, Chris

Farrelly, Paul

Fellows, Marion

Ferrier, Margaret

Flello, Robert

Flynn, Paul

Fovargue, Yvonne

Foxcroft, Vicky

Gardiner, Barry

Gethins, Stephen

Gibson, Patricia

Glass, Pat

Glindon, Mary

Godsiff, Mr Roger

Grady, Patrick

Grant, Peter

Gray, Neil

Green, Kate

Greenwood, Lilian

Greenwood, Margaret

Griffith, Nia

Gwynne, Andrew

Haigh, Louise

Hamilton, Fabian

Hanson, rh Mr David

Harpham, Harry

Harris, Carolyn

Hayes, Helen

Hayman, Sue

Healey, rh John

Henderson, Gordon

Hendrick, Mr Mark

Hendry, Drew

Hepburn, Mr Stephen

Hillier, Meg

Hodgson, Mrs Sharon

Hoey, Kate

Hollern, Kate

Hollobone, Mr Philip

Hopkins, Kelvin

Hosie, Stewart

Huq, Dr Rupa

Hussain, Imran

Irranca-Davies, Huw

Johnson, Diana

Jones, Gerald

Kane, Mike

Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald

Keeley, Barbara

Kerevan, George

Kerr, Calum

Khan, rh Sadiq

Kinnock, Stephen

Lamb, rh Norman

Lammy, rh Mr David

Lavery, Ian

Law, Chris

Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma

Lewis, Clive

Lewis, Mr Ivan

Lewis, rh Dr Julian

Long Bailey, Rebecca

Lucas, Caroline

Lucas, Ian C.

MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan

Mactaggart, rh Fiona

Madders, Justin

Mahmood, Shabana

Malhotra, Seema

Mann, John

Marris, Rob

Marsden, Mr Gordon

Maskell, Rachael

Matheson, Christian

Mc Nally, John

McCabe, Steve

McCaig, Callum

McCarthy, Kerry

McDonald, Andy

McDonald, Stewart Malcolm

McDonald, Stuart C.

McDonnell, Dr Alasdair

McDonnell, John

McGarry, Natalie

McInnes, Liz

McKinnell, Catherine

McLaughlin, Anne

McPartland, Stephen

Meale, Sir Alan

Mearns, Ian

Miliband, rh Edward

Monaghan, Carol

Monaghan, Dr Paul

Moon, Mrs Madeleine

Morden, Jessica

Morris, Grahame M.

Mullin, Roger

Murray, Ian

Nandy, Lisa

Newlands, Gavin

Nicolson, John

O'Hara, Brendan

Onn, Melanie

Onwurah, Chi

Osamor, Kate

Oswald, Kirsten

Owen, Albert

Paterson, Steven

Pearce, Teresa

Pennycook, Matthew

Perkins, Toby

Phillips, Jess

Pound, Stephen

Qureshi, Yasmin

Rayner, Angela

Rees, Christina

Reeves, Rachel

Reynolds, Jonathan

Rimmer, Marie

Ritchie, Ms Margaret

Robertson, rh Angus

Rotheram, Steve

Salmond, rh Alex

Shah, Naz

Sheerman, Mr Barry

Sheppard, Tommy

Sherriff, Paula

Shuker, Mr Gavin

Siddiq, Tulip

Skinner, Mr Dennis

Slaughter, Andy

Smith, rh Mr Andrew

Smith, Cat

Smith, Jeff

Smith, Nick

Smith, Owen

Smyth, Karin

Starmer, Keir

Stephens, Chris

Stevens, Jo

Streeting, Wes

Stringer, Graham

Tami, Mark

Thewliss, Alison

Thomas-Symonds, Nick

Thomson, Michelle

Thornberry, Emily

Timms, rh Stephen

Trickett, Jon

Turner, Karl

Twigg, Derek

Twigg, Stephen

Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew

Vaz, Valerie

Weir, Mike

West, Catherine

Whiteford, Dr Eilidh

Whitehead, Dr Alan

Whitford, Dr Philippa

Williams, Hywel

Williams, Mr Mark

Wilson, Corri

Winnick, Mr David

Wishart, Pete

Wright, Mr Iain

Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**

Owen Thompson

**and**

Liz Saville Roberts

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

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**2 Dec 2015 : Column 497**

**2 Dec 2015 : Column 498**

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*Resolved,*

That this House notes that ISIL poses a direct threat to the United Kingdom; welcomes United Nations Security Council Resolution 2249 which determines that ISIL constitutes an ‘unprecedented threat to international peace and security’ and calls on states to take ‘all necessary measures’ to prevent terrorist acts by ISIL and to ‘eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria’; further notes the clear legal basis to defend the UK and our allies in accordance with the UN Charter; notes that military action against ISIL is only one component of a broader strategy to bring peace and stability to Syria; welcomes the renewed impetus behind the Vienna talks on a ceasefire and political settlement; welcomes the Government’s continuing commitment to providing humanitarian support to Syrian refugees; underlines the importance of planning for post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction in Syria; welcomes the Government’s continued determination to cut ISIL’s sources of finance, fighters and weapons; notes the requests from France, the US and regional allies for UK military assistance; acknowledges the importance of seeking to avoid civilian casualties, using the UK’s particular capabilities; notes the Government will not deploy UK troops in ground combat operations; welcomes the Government’s commitment to provide quarterly progress reports to the House; and accordingly supports Her Majesty’s Government in taking military action, specifically airstrikes, exclusively against ISIL in Syria; and offers its wholehearted support to Her Majesty’s Armed Forces.

**Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I thank you for going through all these hours of debate, and as a doctor may I say that that is not terribly healthy?

**Mr Speaker:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for what she has said. I take note of her health advice, but there have to be exceptions and I wanted to be here to hear every speech. I thank colleagues for what overall I must say was the remarkably decent and gracious tone that characterised the contributions over several hours.

**Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab):** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. May I put on record that it is unlikely that any previous Speaker has ever done what you have done today: sit throughout without a single break? I think the whole House should congratulate you.

**2 Dec 2015 : Column 500**

**Mr Speaker:** I am very flattered and honoured by what the hon. Gentleman has said. I sought no such compliment, but the hon. Gentleman first came into the House 49 years ago and he knows I hold him in the highest esteem, and I thank him for that. The credit is that of the House, however, for the way it has conducted itself today. I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman said. *[Interruption.]*Indeed; I will bank it while I can.

**PETITION**

**Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse**

**10.33 pm**

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con):** I rise to present a petition on behalf of my constituent Mr Tom Perry and 202,731 individuals who are residents of the UK, concerning the mandatory reporting of child abuse. They hope it will improve the position and protection of children in the care of people in regulated activities.

The petition declares:

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that child protection in Regulated Activities is dependent upon a reporting procedure external to the institution(s) in which the concern arises; further that Regulated Activity is defined in the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (SVG) Act 2006 as amended as any paid or unpaid work with children; further that child protection is placed in jeopardy by the absence of any direct statutory legal obligation to report the concern to the local authority or police; and further that online petitions on this matter were signed by 202,731 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to introduce legislation which requires persons in a position of trust who work with children in Regulated Activities and who know, suspect, or have reasonable grounds for knowing or suspecting child abuse, to inform the Local Authority Designated Officer or in appropriate circumstances Children’s Services and make failure to inform a criminal offence.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P001652]

**2 Dec 2015 : Column 501**

**New Build Homes**

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*That this House do now adjourn.—*(Julian Smith.)*

**10.35 pm**

**Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con):** I do not expect you to stay in the Chair for the whole of this Adjournment debate, Mr Speaker. You might be able to hear that I have a slightly croaky voice, so I will by necessity keep my remarks relatively brief.

I welcome the opportunity to raise this issue with the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton). It has been a recurring theme over the past few months, but perhaps that is inevitable as the Government promote house building, and because the number of both starts and completions is up significantly. There are, therefore, more new build homes with the potential to provoke complaints. My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) led a similar debate in July, and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) is chair of the all-party group on excellence in the built environment, which is conducting an inquiry into this very issue.

I will speak on behalf of one constituent in particular, but I will also refer to others, because, sadly, the problems tend not to happen in isolation. Test Valley borough, which covers the greater part of my constituency, has followed what the Government have asked of local planning authorities. Over the past three years, Test Valley has had either the highest or the second highest number of housing completions in the whole of Hampshire, including the two cities of Southampton and Portsmouth. Test Valley has consistently been in the top 10 for housing completions across the whole of the south-east region. Unfortunately, and as one might expect, areas with high levels of house building can also have high levels of complaints from new residents.

Buying a new home is an enormous step for most people. It is exciting, challenging and stressful, probably in equal measure. I think it is true to say that moving home is one of the most stressful things that any individual, couple or family can go through, but it is also certainly exciting. How much more exciting can it be for someone than to move into a new build home that they can put their own mark on and that no one else has lived in?

My hon. Friend the Minister will be delighted to hear that, during the general election campaign earlier this year, I talked to residents at Abbotswood, a new 800-home development on the edge of Romsey. One resident invited me into her new home, which was bought with help from the Government’s Help to Buy scheme. She proudly showed me a photograph—it had pride of place in the sitting room—of her and her husband at Downing Street with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. For Lisa and her husband, there was nothing but joy in being in their own brand new home. Sadly, however, that is not the case for everyone. I requested this debate to highlight some of the challenges facing purchasers of new build properties when things do not go according to plan.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I am conscious of the hon. Lady’s voice, so I do want to keep her here for long. I understand that anybody who buys a new build

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house gets a 10-year warranty, but it is a very informal arrangement. Does she think it is time for the Government to formalise the legislation and make sure that buyers of new build homes are protected?

**Caroline Nokes:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention and I know that he also has a keen interest in this issue. The nub of the matter is the 10-year guarantee and how effectively it comes into play when there is a problem.

As a society we have become very aware of our consumer rights. When making substantial purchases we look for warranties, for quality assurance and for customer service. There is no purchase in life more substantial than buying a house, yet over the past 18 months some of my constituents have felt less protected than they would have been if they had, for example, bought a new car. The protections they believed that they had, and which they had taken for granted, assuming that they would come into action should there be a problem, have simply not had the effect any reasonable consumer would want.

We all know that with new build properties there can be snagging problems. Indeed, back in 1996 I well remember buying a new house and some minor issues needed fixing. The builder came back and sorted them out, and I remember the pride I had in that house and in being able to put my own identity on it, and how happy I was.

What about when the issues are not minor, as was the case with my constituents Evelyn and Riccardo Lallo? Some 18 months after they first identified the problems with their brand new house, they remain in rented accommodation paying a mortgage on a house that they cannot live in. Unfortunately, they are still waiting for the builder, in this case Taylor Wimpey, to remove the undersized ceiling joists, some of the walls and the roof. To be frank, it sounds awfully like a total rebuild, and although they are in rented accommodation, one of their neighbours lived in a hotel for six months.

One of the problems I would like to draw to the Minister’s attention is the assumption by house purchasers that building control is necessarily performed by the local authority. That is not always the case. It is in some, but in many cases the building control checks are done instead by the warranty providers, such as the National House Building Council. There can be very good reasons for that. The warranty companies might prefer it, as they will then be providing the warranty for the building with which they have been involved from a very early stage. Several inspections take place at various stages, from checking the depth of foundations and making sure that cavities are the appropriate size, through to the pre-plaster check. There is a log for each inspection, which my constituents argue should be freely available automatically to the prospective purchaser.

The customer is not necessarily aware of that, and there needs to be a better understanding that a local authority building control inspector might never have seen the building, and the local authority, beyond granting planning permission, might have no direct interest in the subsequent build process. The assumption, however, is that no matter who has carried out the inspection process, problems will be flagged up throughout the process and could be amended in the build process before it moves on to the next stage.

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I am conscious that my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke has raised in detail with the Minister the flaws in the inspection regime, and how that might leave the homeowner in a more vulnerable position than they had ever imagined when entering into the contract to buy a home. I do not intend to repeat those arguments. Suffice it to say that I wholly endorse her view about the need for a duty of care to be established between approved inspectors and the homebuyer, and I welcome the Ankers report in that respect, but we also need somehow to convey to purchasers that they need to be vigilant in the process, and to be aware that it might not be their local authority that has inspected the build.

In the case of my constituents, Mr and Mrs Lallo, they feel very much as if they have been pushed from pillar to post, with each one shrugging shoulders and all pointing back to the builder as the one who must rectify the problems, and that is undoubtedly right. The NHBC system and other warranty providers require the builder to rectify any problem within the first two years, and in this situation the builder, Taylor Wimpey, has accepted that it is its responsibility to replace all the joists and trusses, which had not been installed properly as required. Tonight the scaffolding is up and I understand that the roof will come off tomorrow. We must hope that the sun will be shining.

When a defect is discovered and the builder refuses to carry out the remedial work, a free resolution service is offered by the warranty providers, but what happens when the builder agrees to carry out the work but drags their feet and does not get on with the repairs? That is the point at which my constituents first contacted me. Their bright, shiny new house had unacceptable levels of vibration and investigations revealed the joists and trusses were acting independently of each other. They have to come out, all the plaster must be removed, the ceilings must be taken out and the roof will come off. They contacted the local authority, which very quickly stated that it was not its responsibility, but could find no agency to act as an intermediary between them and the builder to exert the pressure that they wanted to facilitate a speedy and appropriate remedy.

For six months, the family lived with no ceilings after they had been stripped out, walls were missing and their living room furniture was in storage. For a further six months, they have lived in rented housing, expecting at every moment work to start on the house that was meant to be their pride and joy—a home for their boys. My constituents feel that for big purchases such as houses there should also be some protection—someone to speak up on their behalf, to act as an intermediary. It is their contention that there should be some sort of ombudsman, and that idea certainly has some attraction.

My real concern is that if, as happened in the case of my constituents, fundamental structural flaws that should have been picked up in the pre-plaster inspection were being missed, what can we expect as rates of house building accelerate? I hope the Minister can provide some reassurance that the inspection regime remains robust, and that the case of my constituents and their neighbours, who were similarly affected, is unusual. I say that because as house building necessarily increases, we want the owners of new homes to be happy, to have pride in their new homes and, above all, to be protected adequately should the worst happen.

**2 Dec 2015 : Column 504**

**10.46 pm**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) on securing this debate about the protections for purchasers of new build homes. I know that is a matter of concern to a number of hon. Members, and I have personally discussed it previously here in the House, as she recognised in her comments.

Homeowners rightly expect their homes to be built to high standards and to be high quality. I understand that things do not always go right when buying a new home, and it can then be disappointing, time-consuming, stressful and expensive to get things put right. I was concerned to hear about the experiences of my hon. Friend’s constituents. I cannot comment on particular cases, but I am sure the builder concerned will reflect on this debate in how they respond to the situation she described.

The quality of build and compliance with regulatory requirements or standards required under any warranty are the primary responsibility of the builder. There are protections in place, which I will describe, but the industry has to take responsibility for the quality of what it builds. The warranty provides an important protection. If a warranty is in place, the homeowner can contact the warranty provider. Most warranties, such as the NHBC Buildmark, the LABC—local authority build control—warranty and the Premier Guarantee warranty, last for 10 years from the completion of the building works. As my hon. Friend said, in the first two years after completion the builder remains responsible for righting defects caused by breaches of the technical requirements covered by the warranty. The warranty provider will try to get the builder to carry out any necessary work or, in some cases, arrange for work to be carried out themselves. In years three to 10 from the completion of the building work, the warranty provides insurance cover against the cost of repairing defined sorts of defects covered by the scheme.

Warranties are not compulsory for new homes, but the Department is aware that the majority of new homes are covered by a warranty such as the NHBC Buildmark. Mortgage lenders will also expect there to be a warranty in place. Out of all the homeowners covered by NHBC warranties, fewer than 5% need to make a claim under the warranty. Warranty providers also carry out their own inspections, which may be carried out by the building control body as an adjunct to building control inspections.

From what my hon. Friend says, it sounds as though the builder in the specific case she raises accepted responsibility for taking action, which is as it should be, but I fully accept the concerns about the time this has taken. She may wish to raise that with the builder and the warranty provider, if she has not already done so. As I have said, I am sure their attention will be drawn to, if it is not already focused on, the comments that she has made in the House this evening.

A homeowner may also be protected by the consumer code for home builders, an industry-led scheme that aims to give protection and rights to purchasers of new homes. The code applies to all homebuyers who reserve to buy a new or newly converted home, on or after 1 April 2010, built by a home builder registered with one of the supporting warranty bodies, such as the NHBC, the LABC and Premier Guarantee.

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According to the code’s annual report for 2014, between 2010 and 2013, there were 57 cases referred to the code’s independent dispute resolution scheme of which 21 succeeded in part and two succeeded in full. Sanctions for homebuilders not adhering to the code could include financial penalties and suspension from the new home warranty providers’ registers. The code’s management board is undertaking a review to ensure that the code continues to meet the needs of homebuyers in terms of driving up industry standards and customer satisfaction in the new home-buying market. Again, I am sure that their attention will be drawn to the comments that my hon. Friend has made this evening and that can inform the process that is now being undertaken.

It may help if I explain the building control process. Building control systems can contribute to the quality of new homes. Building work, including new build, is subject to supervision by either the local authority building control service or by an approved inspector. In the case of new housing, it is mainly approved inspectors who inspect the work. Again, that was reflected in the speech of my hon. Friend. I should also point out that NHBC has separate corporate entities that carry out the building control function as an approved inspector and that provide warranties.

Building control can only ever be a spot-checking process and in no way removes the primary responsibility for ensuring work complies with the building regulations from the person carrying out the work. However, building control bodies are not clerks of works nor are they responsible for quality issues beyond what is required in the building regulations.

Building control bodies, both local authorities and approved inspectors, have a statutory duty to take all reasonable steps to ascertain that the relevant requirements of the building regulations have been complied with. Building control bodies carry out this duty by checking plans, by carrying out on-site inspections and by checking the validity of energy and water efficiency calculations and other relevant documents. Where there is a need to do so, building control bodies may carry out their own tests and take samples to check compliance.

Based on those processes, the building control body will come to a view on whether the work complies, although that cannot be a guarantee and it does not detract from the ultimate responsibility of the builder. Building control bodies provide advice and guidance throughout the building process on how to bring work up to compliance standards, and in most cases that is sufficient to ensure compliance with the building regulations on completion of the construction work. If an approved inspector is unsuccessful in getting compliance, they can revert the work to the local authority for enforcement action. If the local authority considers that there has been a breach of the building regulations, it can take formal enforcement action, including prosecution.

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If anyone believes that a building control body has been negligent in carrying out its building control function, a complaint can be made to the local government ombudsman about local authorities and for approved inspectors to CICAIR Limited, the body designated by the Secretary of State to carry out his executive and administrative functions in respect of the approval and re-approval of approved inspectors.

The quality of new homes is an important issue. My hon. Friend has spoken eloquently about her concerns and is aware of the work of the all-party parliamentary group on excellence in the built environment, which is currently considering this issue.

I am pleased to see that those involved in the built environment have the opportunity to express their views on the quality of new homes as well as on how improvements can be made to ensure new houses are of high quality. In particular, NHBC’s submission to the group explains that they are undertaking a number of initiatives to help ensure that the quality of new homes continues to improve. These include introducing, in 2016, construction quality audits of sites under construction and registered with a Buildmark warranty.

These audits will involve NHBC’s inspection managers undertaking structured detailed audits of construction quality throughout the construction stages. The data collected will be analysed and used to provide feedback at industry and builder-specific levels in order to assist the industry in identifying opportunities for improvement including how this may be achieved.

Members have raised serious issues on this occasion and on others. The Government are concerned that standards are adhered to and look forward to the findings of the APPG to see what further work might be done to continue to improve the quality of new homes both by my Department and by others involved in the construction process.

My hon. Friend has raised some very important issues on behalf of her constituents this evening. I have certainly taken note of what she has said. I have no doubt that others, both those directly involved in some of the specific cases that she raised and those working more generally in this field, will be aware of the concerns that Members from across the House have brought to this place in recent times. We want to ensure that people can confidently buy new homes, and confidently make what is often the largest investment that they will ever make. She raised some important points in that regard and I will be happy to discuss issues with her as they progress and to work with her to ensure that her constituents and mine can have confidence in the systems that are in place and the protection that they should rightly be able to expect.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**10.54 pm**

*House adjourned.*