

## Frequently Asked Questions on Syria

*Note: I have collected these questions from those put to Ministers and from constituents. The answers are provided following the briefings received from Government and its military and defence advisors.*

### **1. Will the surrounding Gulf States show commitment to this conflict?**

Yes, they are committed as ISIL is a threat to them. They are clearly aligned to this cause.

### **2. There has been talk of 70,000 opposition forces?**

This is a Joint Intelligence Committee estimation having worked out who is who in Syria. There are 70,000 troops on the ground who do not belong to ISIL. 40,000 will engage in political participation. 30,000 are more militant but open to some form of political participation. There are also 25,000 other militants who engage against ISIL but would not engage with the west so are not within the 70,000 but are not on ISIL's side.

All groups within the 70,000 have signed up to the Geneva Convention to lead Syria towards a free political state.

### **3. Civilian Casualties?**

It was confirmed that there have been no civilian casualties from the UK's 14 months of precision air strikes in Iraq. The proposal in Syria is to replicate what the UK is undertaking in Iraq. Enormous care is taken to monitor targets and ensure there are no civilian casualties - this has succeeded in Iraq.

### **4. Are we able to defeat ISIL with Assad in charge?**

Syrian civilian authorities would prefer coalition forces to ISIL. There are areas where opposition sources have been able to take over from ISIL. The Syrians are reliant on Russian support and Russia has sufficient control on the Assad regime. The Russians are part of the Vienna accord transition process so we expect their continued cooperation.

### **5. How long will the bombing last?**

Air-strikes will last until ISIL is defeated. The Vienna political solution will go on alongside. It could be 2 years or more of air strikes.

### **6. Financial Cost?**

As a comparison, the cost of the identical operation on Iraq has cost £80m for the last 6 months.

### **7. Why are we ruling out ground force troops?**

When air strikes were launched on ISIL positions in Iraq, the Iraqi Prime Minister did not request western troops on the grounds as it was widely believed that this would radicalise more troops. This is the same judgment for Syria - introducing non-Muslim troops on the ground would be counterproductive. The language of the motion before Parliament is from the UN mandate. Ground forces have to be Syrian owned.

### **8. More detail on Brimstone precision?**

Brimstone is a missile which is unique to the UK. Every weapon in our arsenal, if not unique, is precision focussed. Precision-led bombing reduces the risk of collateral damage.

### **9. Is Russia Committed to a new Syria?**

The Russians are as committed to ISIL eradication as the UK is. The Russians are committed to this entire process, both the military and the political solutions, and are part of the Vienna process planning for a post-Assad Syria.

### **10. What if the 70,000 troops do not deliver?**

The UK, and other partners in the Vienna process, remain confident that a post-Assad Syrian Government will want to reclaim its own territory. This issue is not about redrawing borders - this is a condition which the Russians have insisted upon in their contribution to the Vienna process. It may, however, take time for the Syrian opposition to reclaim their country.

### **11. If Western troops on the ground will radicalise, won't dropping bombs do likewise?**

The difficulty is that radicalisation is occurring and we are already a target and are not stopping ISIL in Syria. Radicalisation via air attacks is less antagonistic than troops on the ground. It has not had the negative effects in Iraq.

### **12. What will military action do to impact the Vienna process?**

The Vienna process is a separate track. There are two tracks and the UK Government is committed to making progress on both at the same time. This twin strategy is accepted by all partners.

### **13. Has any assessment been made of impact on ISIL from bombs recently dropped on Syria?**

Most bombs in Syria, to date, have been dropped in support of Assad forces (by Russia) or for Kurdish support. There have recently been strikes on ISIL in its Syrian heartlands. ISIL is currently under a lot more pressure due to being challenged on a number of fronts (Syria and Iraq) and by more countries since Russia joined the attacks. By striking at their heart, we can penetrate the air of supremacy and make ISIL feel vulnerable.

### **14. What if our allies (Russia) start bombing the 70,000 free army?**

In Vienna, the countries participating (and this includes Russia and Iran) have made a cross-group agreement as to which groups are legitimate targets and can be attacked. Russia has become more nuanced on who the terrorists are (not just identifying by being enemies to Assad regime).

### **15. Are we committed long term to this process?**

We are committed for as long as it takes to eradicate the ISIL threat against the UK.

### **16. Why can Gulf States not support the free Syrian army?**

Not seen as required as sufficient numbers of troops on the ground can, it is maintained, be found from within the 'Free Syria' forces. If it comes to it, there would

be sense in having the first call for troops on the ground to be provided by neighbouring Gulf States.

### **17. Targets and Legal Advice**

Whilst it is not possible to detail specific targets, there are checks and balances in place which will mitigate against civilian targets. The Secretary of State for Defence can only authorise strikes in accordance with the legal advice given to him.

### **18. Saudi Arabian help?**

The Saudis are engaged and have played a constructive role in the process. Saudi Arabia and Iran are now sitting across the table playing a role - a remarkable achievement and evidence that the Vienna political solution has the parties on board to deliver a post-Assad Syria.

### **19. What plans are being made for ISIL attacks on our soil?**

There is ongoing work from the police and intelligence forces who are engaged 24 hrs a day, 7 days per week, on routing out potential attacks. Our security services and police are continuously planning to ensure that targets are known and removed. The Home Office continues with the Prevent strategy, as well as the Protect work to disrupt plots and identify those who are perpetrators and to prosecute them. There has more recently been a push by the UK to target firearms exports across Europe. It is easier to traffic firearms across continental Europe than in to the UK. The UK Government is working with the EU Commission to deliver stricter firearms laws across the EU.

### **20. Will we protect the Syrian state?**

The Vienna process has ensured that there will be no seeking to dismantle the Syrian state borders. The process is committed to encouraging a new regime. However, the aim is to keep the army, civil service and other agencies intact to allow Syria to be reconstructed within its country boundaries.