



Westminster Round Up | January 2019

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Focus Points

14.01.19 Defence Secretary pledges to continue fighting IS with support of Kurdish partners

In the aftermath of President Trump's surprise announcement that US forces will withdraw from Syria, MPs expressed their concerns at abandoning the fight against IS pre-emptively and leaving Kurdish partners behind without adequate support. Gavin Williamson expressed his gratitude to the Kurdish fighters and emphasised repeatedly that there is more to be done to ensure that IS are defeated.

15.01.19 RWP gives evidence on global Islamist Terrorism

In an evidence session to the Defence Committee, Emily Knowles, Director of the Remote Warfare Programme, focused on the long-term military-, political- and legal effects of working with partners to obtain short-term counter-terrorism goals abroad. She drew on the conclusions of the [three major research reports](#) RWP released last year which examined the long-term effects of remote warfare. You can find a video recording of the evidence session [here](#).

Highlights

08.01.19 Importance of monitoring human rights compliance by partner forces emphasised

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In a debate on democracy in Uganda, Dr Paul Williams MP argued that the UK needs to ensure that, when it provides security assistance to partner forces like the Uganda People's Defence Force, it must apply rigorous safeguards to reduce the risk of civilian harm or human rights abuses. RWP recently wrote about [possible UK legal liability](#) if the forces the UK support engage in human rights abuses.

09.01.19 Minister reaffirms government's commitment of continuing to send aid to Syria

In response to a debate about the impact of a U.S. withdrawal from Syria, and concerns that this would alter the UK's commitment to sending aid to the region, Foreign Office Minister (joint with DfID), Alastair Burt, said that the UK did not yet have a clear understanding of the US' plans for withdrawal, but nonetheless reassured MPs that the UK will continue to support civilians and attempt to protect Kurdish forces by the Turkish border.

22.01.19 Foreign Office Minister says 2018 elections will help rebuild a war-weary Iraq

Alistair Burt pointed to Iraq's elections last year as an opportunity to strengthen governance of Iraq by including Kurds in the government and increasing adherence to human rights. RWP's Director Emily Knowles recently wrote a [briefing](#) on the complexities of strengthening the Iraqi Security Sector in the aftermath of this election which has – in fact - yet to bring any certainty to the country.

In a [separate debate](#), Mr Burt assured the MPs that the UK is in constant communication with both Turkey and the US in an effort to ensure that the US's

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withdrawal from Syria does not allow Turkey to attack Kurdish forces near their southern border.

22.01.19 Secretary of State for Defence commits the UK to continued presence in Syria despite U.S. withdrawal

Members of the House of Commons Defence Committee put questions to Gavin Williamson, asking whether the sudden US drawback would embolden IS and allow it to regain lost territory. The Defence Secretary assured the Committee that the UK has no plans to leave the struggle against IS, and will continue to support the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria.

Watch the video here.

Image credit: Cpl. Tracy McKithern/US Army.

About the Author

Megan Karlshoej-Pedersen *is a Research and Policy Assistant at ORG's Remote Warfare Programme. She supports the team's research on changes in military engagement, as well as their work with Parliament and policy-makers. Her research interests include international security, armed groups, and sub-national conflict analysis.*

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