

Further supplementary evidence submitted by the Ministry of Defence

Thank you for your letter of 4th July.

In answer to your first question, the table at Annex A updates the information about weapons releases in Iraq and Syria for the months of May and June 2016. Your second and third questions request monthly data on RAF strikes in Iraq from July 2015 to end June 2016 based on the Coalition method of calculating strikes and on the former UK methodology. As explained in my letter of 20 June and in the Written Ministerial Statement from which your Table 1 is drawn, we decided last year that it would be preferable for consistency to use Coalition produced information. Updated information on this basis is in the tables at Annex B. We do not hold any data calculated by the UK methodology since June 2015 and consider that there would be no operational value in producing it.

You also requested that we should categorise the strikes conducted in Syria to break out those mounted in direct support of opposition forces fighting on the ground. As I explained previously, we do not hold information in this form and there is no operational benefit in diverting scarce Departmental resources to this work. As you yourself have indicated however, the information provided in relation to weapon releases, taken with the additional information provided in my last letter to you on the various categories, should allow you to draw some conclusions as to the broad order contribution of RAF aircraft against different types of target in Syria.

In relation to UK air support to forces engaged in the counter-Daesh fight in Syria, I would stress that neither the UK nor the Coalition is undertaking a generalised bombing campaign in Syria in support of moderate armed opposition groups. Rather the Coalition is giving targeted air support to specific counter-Daesh offensives, in particular in northwest Syria where the Syrian Democratic Forces are engaged around Manbij and where other opposition forces have been seeking to push eastwards from the area of Azaaz and Mar'a, with RAF aircraft playing their part when called to do so. The Coalition Air Operations Centre allocates targets across Iraq and Syria on a case by case basis according to operational need and the availability and suitability of different coalition aircraft and weapon systems to engage individual target sets. In each case, the option chosen balances a range of factors. The availability of RAF aircraft and weapon systems to contribute to the counter-Daesh fight, both strategic and tactical and across both theatres, provides important additional flexibility to the Coalition enabling it to prosecute the overall counter-Daesh campaign more effectively.

Finally, you ask for a list of the “main armed opposition moderate groups – apart from the Kurds – who we are supporting in Syria”. As you are aware, the Prime Minister set out last year our estimate that there were around 70,000 Syrian opposition fighters on the ground who do not belong to extremist groups, many of whom were linked to the Free Syrian Army, noting that information on individual groups was drawn in large part from intelligence and it would not be to the benefit of these non-extremist opposition fighters if we were to make it public to Daesh and the Syrian regime. My Right Honourable Friend the Minister of State of

the Armed Forces provided two written answers on 22 April 2016 (33816 and 33889) which noted our assessment that non-extremist opposition numbers had held up despite recent pressure and that numbers in groups fighting Daesh were likely to have increased.

9 July 2016

Weapons Releases in Iraq and Syria

	May 2016			June 2016		
	Iraq	Syria	Total	Iraq	Syria	Total
Weapon Type Released						
Hellfire	13	1	14	49	4	53
DMS Brimstone	11	0	11	10	0	10
Enhanced Paveway 3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paveway IV	118	2	120	110	6	116
Enhanced Paveway 2	0	5	5	15	0	15
GBU-12	1	0	1	11	0	11
Storm Shadow	0	0	0	4	0	4
Total	143	8	151	319	10	329

Numbers of Airstrikes**Iraq**

Month	Number of UK strikes
July 2015	26
August 2015	29
September 2015	34
October 2015	17
November 2015	58
December 2015	75
January 2016	79
February 2016	54
Mar 2016	64
April 2016	67
May 2016	65
June 2016	72

Syria

Date	Number of UK strikes
December 2015	11
January 2016	20
February 2016	6
March 2016	3
April 2016	5
May 2016	3
June 2016	5

These strike numbers are constantly reviewed and updated by the Coalition to ensure records are as complete and accurate as possible. As such, there may be minor changes in future statements regarding such statistics.