



DEBATE PACK

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Kurdistan region in Iraq

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Summary

The Syria conflict and the fight against ISIS in Iraq have raised the possibility of major changes for Kurds in the region. The conflicts have demonstrated the effectiveness of Kurdish fighters, and these have been one of the biggest recipients of Western, including UK, aid, training and equipment.¹

Kurds in Syria and Iraq are in very different circumstances, however, and Kurds should not be seen as a homogeneous unit. Turkish, Syrian, Iranian and Iraqi Kurds speak dialects that are significantly different and Turkish/Syrian Kurds are not closely aligned with Iraqi Kurds, who have a better relationship with the Turkish Government.

Iraqi Kurds have lived in an autonomous region since the early 1990s, although that autonomy was strengthened and codified in the 2005 Iraqi constitution after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.²

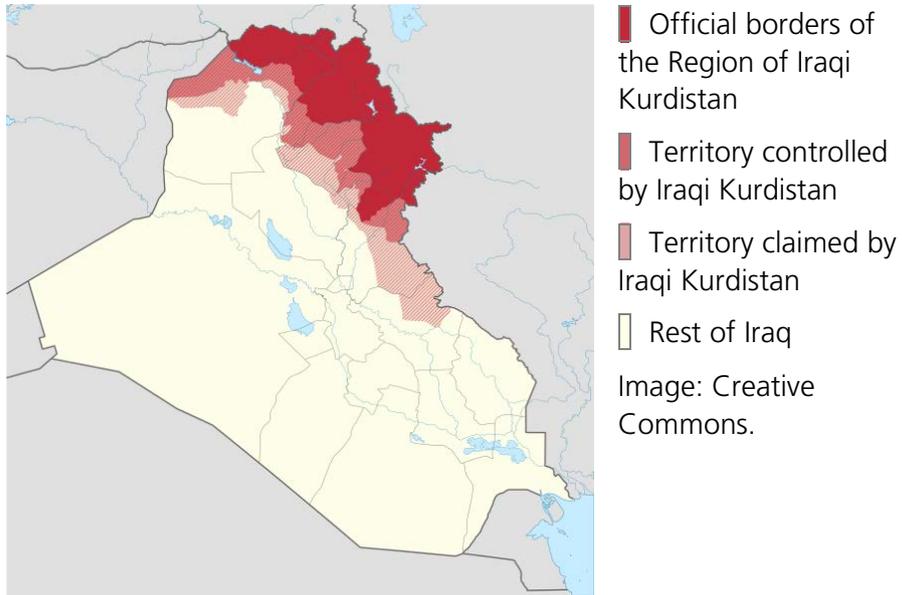
Saddam was concerned about the number of Kurds in cities near oilfields and their possible disloyalty to Iraq. In Kirkuk, particularly, he expelled some 120,000 Kurds and other non-Arabs to cement Arab Iraqi control. So the area officially controlled by the Kurdish Regional Government is smaller than that which the Kurds consider their historic territory.

The instability in Iraq following the ISIS/Daesh 'surge' in summer 2014, combined with the effective role of the Kurdish Peshmerga in fighting against ISIS, has allowed Iraqi Kurds to take control of a slice of territory outside the official Kurdish Autonomous Region, including Kirkuk. The battle for Mosul, in which the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga have a big role, may offer the opportunity to hold more territory.

Newspaper reports suggest that some of this territory (particularly those areas that are not traditionally majority-Kurdish) could be used as a bargaining chip to gain independence from Iraq. Mosul itself is traditionally a mixed Arab/Kurdish/Assyrian city. Kurdish leaders hope that the Trump Administration will be open to supporting full independence from Baghdad.³

While the strategic picture for Iraqi Kurds might appear promising, domestic politics are more troubled. The KRG area is itself strongly divided between the areas dominated by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdish Democratic Party. Massoud Barzani has been leader of the KDP since 1979 and Kurdish President since 2005; elections have been put off. The parliament does not function. There has been a string of assassinations and foiled terrorist attacks. An independence referendum is planned for September 2017, but one

analyst suggests that such internal instability threatens the plans for statehood after the defeat of ISIS.⁴



⁴ Denise Natali, 'Is Iraqi Kurdistan heading toward civil war?', Al-Monitor,

2. Iraqi Kurdistan profile

Iraqi Kurdistan profile

BBC News Online

30 April 2017

Iraq's 2005 Constitution recognises an autonomous Kurdistan region in the north of the country, run by the Kurdistan Regional Government.

This was the outcome of decades of political and military efforts to secure self-rule by the Kurdish minority, who are estimated to number more than 6 million and make up between 17% and 20% of the population of Iraq.

Kurds, who number 30-40 million in total, live in a compact area that reaches from Syria in the west to Iran in the east and Iraq in the south, north through Turkey, and into the states of the former Soviet Caucasus.



Only in Iraq have they managed to set up a stable government of their own in recent times, albeit within a federal state.

However, the increase of sectarian tensions within Iraq as a whole from 2013 onwards, culminating in a campaign of violence launched by the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamic State of Iraq, meant that by 2014 the unity of Iraq was under severe threat.

In July 2014, Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani announced that his government planned to hold a referendum on independence later in the year, given that Iraq was already "effectively partitioned". The announcement triggered alarm among Iraq's neighbours, who feared that it could set a precedent for their own restive Kurdish minorities.

But a change of leadership in the Iraqi government was followed by improved relations with Iraqi Kurdistan. The two sides agreed to work

together to defeat the common enemy of Islamic State and plans for an independence referendum were put on hold.

Long struggle

The Kurds of Iraq came under British colonial rule after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. Frustrated in their hopes for independence, Kurdish leaders launched a series of rebellions against British and subsequent Iraqi rule.

These were put down ruthlessly, most notoriously in the late 1980s when Saddam Hussein attacked the Kurds with massed armed forces in the 'Anfal' campaign.

This involved the deliberate targeting of civilians with chemical weapons, most notoriously in the town of Halabja in 1988.

Various Iraqi governments promised autonomy to the Kurds after the 1958 revolution, but none came to fruition until the anti-Saddam international coalition established a partial no-fly zone in northern Iraq in 1991 after the first Gulf War.

This allowed Kurdish leaders and their Peshmerga armed forces to consolidate their hold on the north after Iraqi forces withdrew, and provided the basis for the 2005 constitutional settlement.

Post-Saddam reconstruction

The immediate tasks facing the Kurdish government were great, and included rebuilding infrastructure, creating an administration and absorbing hundreds of thousands of displaced people after years of war and destruction.

Overall its efforts exceeded all expectations. Iraqi Kurdistan largely escaped the privations of the last years of Saddam's rule and the chaos that followed his ouster in 2003, and built a parliamentary democracy with a growing economy.

Major problems remain, nonetheless. The landlocked Kurdistan Region is surrounded by countries unsympathetic to Kurdish aspirations, like Turkey and Iran, and by states approaching internal collapse - Syria and the rest of Iraq.

It is also in dispute with the Iraqi government over several territories, in particular the historic city of Kirkuk. No agreement has been reached over Kirkuk, but in the summer of 2014, when the city was in danger of falling to the hard-line Sunni Islamists of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), Kurdish Peshmerga forces pre-empted this by seizing Kirkuk themselves.

Tension between the main political parties - the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party - erupted into a civil war that almost destroyed the autonomous government in 1994-97, and some differences remain.

3. Press articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

Iraq and Syria face further instability as Isis influence wanes

Financial Times
David Gardner
29 June 2017

The time has come for Iraqi Kurdistan to make its choice on independence

Washington Post
Masoud Marzani
28 June 2017

Kurds see chance to advance their cause in ruins of Islamic State

Guardian
Martin Chulov
24 June 2017

Shia militias vow to fight new Kurdish state in Iraq

The Times
Richard Spencer
21 June 2017

The Kurdish region of Iraq is going to vote on independence. Here's what you need to know

Washington Post
Morgan L. Kaplan and Ramzy Mardini
21 June 2017

The looming question of Kurdish independence in Iraq

Al-jazeera
21 June 2017

Turkey Must Respect Iraqi Kurds' Referendum Move: Barzani Adviser

US News and World Report
21 June 2017

Kurdistan's referendum won't lead to independence—so why hold it?

Adrian Florea
Newsweek
20 June 2017

Kurdistan representative: Iranian-backed Shia militias undermine Kurdish region

Washington Times
Laura Kelly
19 June 2017

No International Support for Kurdistan Referendum? No Problem, Says Erbil

Foreign Policy
Emily Tamkin
19 June 2017

Iraqi Kurds to hold independence referendum in September

BBC News Online
7 June 2017

4. PQs

Iraq: Kurds

24 Apr 2017 | 70506

Asked by: Dawn Butler

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what plans her Department has to make British medical aid available to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Answering member: Rory Stewart | Department: Department for International Development

The UK funds the delivery of life-saving medical services in Iraq, including in the Kurdistan Region. This support is delivered through a number of partners including the Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund and the International Organisation for Migration. Through our response to the conflict in Mosul we are helping to alleviate the pressure on the Kurdistan Region's medical services.

Iraq: Armed Conflict

21 Mar 2017 | HL5874

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the reports of fighting last week in Sinjar, between Kurdish forces, Peshmarga and PKK, and of the reported displacement of Yazidi families from Sinjar; and what is known about their whereabouts and well-being.

Answering member: Baroness Anelay of St Johns | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are aware of localised conflict on 3 March between Kurdish groups in Sinjar which resulted in seven fatalities. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) moved to contain the risk of escalation and calm was quickly restored. Due to the clash, a number of families from the surrounding area of Khanh Sor fled to Sinjar Mountain. The UN is assessing the situation and considering whether any assistance is required. We are monitoring the situation carefully and are in close contact with the Government in Baghdad, the KRG, and the Provincial Government in Ninewa Province.

Iraq: Islamic State**06 Mar 2017 | HL5453****Asked by: Lord Hylton**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports by Human Rights Watch that 180 boys under 18 are being detained by the Kurdistan regional government on suspicion of involvement with ISIS, and of reports that they were tortured and deprived of contact with their families.

Answering member: Baroness Anelay of St Johns**| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The Government takes any allegations of human rights abuses or violations extremely seriously and stands ready to challenge governments on these allegations. These are grave allegations made by Human Rights Watch and we stand ready to raise concerns with the Kurdistan Regional Government. We are currently working with the European Union Delegation in Kurdistan, other local diplomatic missions and Human Rights Watch to better understand the allegations. Once this process has been completed we will consider what further action will follow.

Iraq: Overseas Aid**20 Feb 2017 | HL5245****Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Coventry**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to enlist the help of churches, religious institutions and communities in the provision of aid and support to those individuals in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq who have fled their homes to escape Daesh.

Answering member: Lord Bates | Department: Department for International Development

Faith-based organisations in Iraq are able to access UK funding through the UN-managed Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund, to which the UK is the largest donor. UK officials have met with faith-based organisations to discuss the humanitarian situation and to provide guidance on how to access the fund. UK Officials in the Kurdistan region are in regular contact with the Christian, Yezidi, and Muslim community leaders, and have participated in a Religious Dialogue Conference where all religions of the Kurdistan region were represented. All UK-funded humanitarian aid in the Kurdistan Region is distributed on the basis of need, irrespective of race, religion or ethnicity.

Iraq: Humanitarian Aid**20 Feb 2017 | HL5246****Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Coventry**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the current humanitarian situation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the existing levels of international donor support.

Answering member: Lord Bates | Department: Department for International Development

The Kurdistan region hosts over one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 230,000 Syrian refugees. A combination of the economic downturn in Iraq and IDP numbers has placed pressure on services in the region. The UN's 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan was developed in coordination with both the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government and has received strong donor support. It has so far received 90% of the funds needed to provide life-saving assistance to 7.3 million vulnerable Iraqis, including those living in the Kurdistan region. The UN will launch a new Humanitarian Response Plan for 2017 later this month.

Iraq: Military Intervention

10 Feb 2017 | 63232

Asked by: Tom Brake

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what reports his Department has received on the mistreatment of Sunni Arab refugees by Kurdish forces following the offensive of Mosul.

Answering member: Mike Penning | Department: Ministry of Defence

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is aware of some reports of the mistreatment of civilians by Kurdish forces engaged in the liberation of Mosul. Both Prime Minister Abadi and Kurdish Regional President Barzani have been clear that International Humanitarian Law must be respected and that any allegations of violations will be investigated and those responsible held to account.

The MOD takes its role in upholding and promoting human rights very seriously. UK troops carrying out building partner capacity training in the Kurdish region of Iraq include International Humanitarian Law as an integral part of that training and the UK continues to lobby the Government of Iraq, Kurdish Regional Government and other authorities to respect International Humanitarian Law.

Iraq: Military Intervention

07 Feb 2017 | 62402

Asked by: Tom Brake

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions the Government has had with Iraqi and Kurdish authorities on the withdrawal of Kurdish forces from lands they have captured in northern Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK has regular discussions – at ministerial level, and through our Embassy in Baghdad and Consulate-General in Erbil - with the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

- in which we stress the need for an inclusive political plan for Northern Iraq following Daesh's defeat. That includes ensuring that the current military cooperation between the KRG and GoI is transferred into political cooperation after Mosul's liberation. The KRG has committed to withdraw from those territories captured from Daesh since the start of the Mosul operation in October 2016. We support and welcome that position. We also continue to encourage the GoI and KRG to resolve the future status of the disputed territories through dialogue in line with Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution.

Iraq: International Assistance

24 Jan 2017 | 60508

Asked by: Henry Smith

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how much funding from the UK's contribution to the Iraq humanitarian pooled fund is provided to projects in the Kurdistan region; and if she will make a statement.

Answering member: Rory Stewart | Department: Department for International Development

The UK is the largest contributor to the United Nations (UN) administered Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund (IHPF) and since 2015 has disbursed £54m to the fund. Approximately 13.6% (£9.75m) of the IHPF was provided to projects based in the area administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 2016.

Kurds: Internally Displaced People

24 Jan 2017 | 60509

Asked by: Henry Smith

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how much funding her Department has provided to the Kurdistan regional government for support of internally displaced people in the Kurdistan region since 2014; and if she will make a statement.

Answering member: Rory Stewart | Department: Department for International Development

Since summer 2014, the UK has committed £169.5m of humanitarian assistance to Iraq, including to internally displaced people in the Kurdistan region. UK assistance is provided through the UN which coordinates distribution and delivery. Therefore the UK does not specifically earmark humanitarian assistance for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Since 2014, the UK has provided support to the KRG, to build the capacity of the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCCC) which coordinates KRG humanitarian activities and liaises with the Government of Iraq, UN and other actors involved in the humanitarian response in Iraq. The UK is also supporting UN agencies that play a direct role in helping the KRG manage the impact of operations in Mosul and elsewhere in Iraq.

Iraq

18 Oct 2016 | 615 c662

Asked by: Stephen Metcalfe

As my hon. Friend will know, the Kurdistan regional government has, for a long time, been short-changed—if not cut off completely—by the Government in Baghdad. Although there are some promising signs, Iraqi federalism needs to be genuine, with reliable revenue sharing. Will my hon. Friend convey that to his Iraqi counterparts and remind them of the contribution that the Kurds and the peshmerga are making in pushing back the advances of Daesh?

Answered by: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the incredible work and bravery of the peshmerga. They are one of the toughest fighting forces in Iraq, and it is important that they are working with the newly trained Iraqi forces in the liberation of the city of Mosul, which has now begun. He is also right to raise concerns about the relationship between Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq. We have long maintained that it is important, and in our interests, to see a united Iraq, but recognising the federated models. It is in the constitution and, to that end, I was pleased that the bilateral forum that we had last week also included Falah Mustafa, the spokesman on foreign affairs for Kurdistan.

Iraq

18 Oct 2016 | 615 c663

Asked by: Mike Gapes

The hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) mentioned the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the Minister will be aware that the KRG is hosting not just hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria, but potentially 1 million internally displaced Iraqis. As they are not refugees, they do not receive the support or recognition that they need. If the conflict in Mosul leads to hundreds of thousands more refugees, will the Minister provide more support from our Government to the KRG?

Answered by: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The hon. Gentleman touches on a very serious matter that is challenging, to say the least. The UNDP recognises that once the liberation of Mosul takes place, refugees will flood out of the capital city in different directions, including into Kurdistan. When I visited, the camps were not in place. The refugees were in schools, preventing the beginning of the school curriculum in September. We pay tribute to the work of Kurdistan. Indeed, much in our DFID programmes has gone to support refugees in that part of Iraq.

Kurds: Politics and Government
20 Sep 2016 | 45870

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Iraqi government on devolution of powers to the Kurdistan regional government.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The autonomy of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq remains enshrined in the 2003 Iraqi Constitution. The Foreign Secretary, my Rt Hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), our Ambassador to Baghdad, our Consul General in Erbil and I emphasise regularly with both the Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government the UK's aim to see a stable, democratic, prosperous and unified Iraq. We also work actively to ensure that both the Kurdistan Regional Government and Government of Iraq cooperate to resolve their differences. In that context we welcome the recent revenue sharing agreement over Kirkuk oil.

5. Other Parliamentary material

5.1 Debates

Bilateral Relations: Kurdistan Region of Iraq

15 Jan 2014 | 573 cc275-296WH

5.2 Statements

Gifting of Equipment to the Kurdish Regional Government

HCWS45

22 June 2015

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): I am laying a departmental minute today concerning the gifting of military equipment to the Government of Iraq (GOI), including the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). This is at the request of the KRG.

The UK is providing extensive support to the GOI in the continuing fight against ISIL, with the gifting of equipment forming a significant part of this. Previously, HMG has gifted 50 tonnes of non-lethal support, 40 heavy machine guns and nearly half a million rounds of ammunition to the Kurdish Peshmerga. The latest equipment to be gifted to the Peshmerga consists of additional medical supplies. The supplies will consist of items such as tourniquets, bandage kits and dressings for wounds and will fill a significant gap in their resources, leading to the preservation of life and proper treatment of injuries sustained in combat.

It is estimated that the total cost of the equipment will be approximately £600,000, although this may change dependent on the need of the KRG.

UK Operations Against ISIL

586 cc9-10WS

13 October 2014

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): On 26 September 2014, the House voted in favour of military operations in support of the Government of Iraq's fight against ISIL, including the use of air strikes. Military action is part of the Government's comprehensive strategy, working in consultation with our allies in the wider coalition, to tackle ISIL.

As set out in statements on 2 September, *Official Report*, column 15WS, and 9 September, *Official Report*, column 33WS, our Armed Forces had already been involved in Iraq supporting humanitarian efforts, delivering equipment, weapons and ammunition to the Kurdistan Regional Government and contributing to coalition surveillance of ISIL. We are now undertaking military action in support of the coalition campaign.

The RAF began flying Tornado GR4 strike missions on 27 September. As of 10 October they have conducted 20 missions over Iraq. The Tornado provides strike capability with its highly accurate Brimstone missiles and Paveway guided bombs, allowing strikes against ISIL while minimising the risk of civilian casualties, and supports the coalition's need for greater intelligence and surveillance with its reconnaissance pods. The first UK strike took place on 30 September, and six Tornado missions have resulted in weapons being released, hitting eight separate targets. The presence of armed jets in the skies has also curtailed ISIL's ability to move freely and given Kurdish and Iraqi defenders time to organise and space to attack. ISIL fighters have been observed changing their tactics and trying to draw the coalition into inflicting civilian casualties as they take shelter amongst the civilian population.

We announced the short term deployment of two additional Tornado GR4s to RAF Akrotiri to provide resilience to our operation and allow us to maintain our tempo of missions. The new Voyager air-to-air refuelling capability and the Rivet Joint surveillance aircraft which began operation on 9 August continue to provide vital support to both British and coalition aircraft.

We are continuing to deliver support to the Kurdistan Regional Government forces at the request of the Government of Iraq. C-17 and C-130 aircraft in co-ordination with Canadian and Danish transport planes have so far delivered over 300 tonnes of supplies to Erbil for Kurdish Peshmerga units. This includes over 100 tonnes of UK-gifted weapons and equipment and over 200 tonnes of weapons and ammunition from supportive countries.

A training team has begun instructing Peshmerga soldiers on the operation of 40 UK-gifted heavy machine guns. Other training teams addressing soldiering skills, medical and counter-explosive device knowledge are planned.

Our network of liaison officers in Iraq and the region has expanded to better understand the situation, work with our partners and help sustain the coalition which critically includes regional partners involved in operations. The Ministry of Defence is working closely with the Foreign Office to ensure our activity is co-ordinated to support the Iraqi authorities in providing a more inclusive government in Sunni areas liberated from ISIL control.

Throughout the campaign C-130 transport aircraft remain ready to deliver more humanitarian aid provided by the Department for International Development (DFID) and pre-positioned in Cyprus.

I will continue to keep the House informed of defence activities.

Gifting of Equipment

585 c33WS

9 September 2014

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): I am laying a departmental minute today concerning the gifting of military equipment to the Government of Iraq (GoI), including the Kurdish Regional Government. This is at the request of the GoI.

The UK is committed to assisting the GoI by: alleviating the humanitarian suffering of those Iraqis targeted by ISIL terrorists; promoting an inclusive, sovereign and democratic Iraq that can push back on ISIL advances and restore stability and security across the country; and working with the international community to tackle the broader threat that ISIL poses to the region and other countries around the world, including the UK. The Kurdish forces remain significantly less well equipped than ISIL and we are responding to help them defend themselves, protect citizens and push back ISIL advances.

The initial gifting package is scheduled to arrive in Iraq on Wednesday 10 September and will consist of heavy machine guns and ammunition. The total cost is approximately £1.6 million plus an estimated £475,000 in transport costs.

Operations in Iraq (Update)

585 cc15-6WS

2 September 2014

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): I wish to provide an update to the House on military activity in Iraq.

The ambition to create an extremist caliphate in the heart of Iraq and Syria is a direct threat to our own security in the UK. The Government are committed to using their aid, diplomatic, political and military expertise to focus on three objectives: alleviating the humanitarian suffering; to promoting an inclusive, sovereign and democratic Iraq; and working with the international community to tackle the broader threat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) poses to the region and countries around the world, including the UK.

As the House will be aware, following the advances of ISIL and the threat it posed to the civilian population, we received requests for assistance from the Iraqi Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Working with international partners and other Departments in Government, the Ministry of Defence has assisted in alleviating the immediate humanitarian situation, and in providing help so the Iraqi authorities can contain and push back ISIL and protect the civilian population.

Between 9 and 14 August, the UK delivered a total of 75 tonnes of humanitarian aid, provided by the Department for International

Development (DFID) over Mount Sinjar through seven successful C-130 aircraft sorties. This aid was delivered to help thousands of Iraqis who had been displaced by ISIL. These flights were fully integrated with the US and included participation from the Royal Australian Air Force. UK operations ceased when the operation was concluded by US Central Command. RAF Akrotiri hosted the air transport used to drop humanitarian aid, as well as four CH-47 Chinook helicopters which prepared for a potential evacuation of displaced people from the mountain.

Overnight on 30 and 31 August, two UK C-130s dropped 13.8 tonnes of DFID aid to the town of Amerli, near Kirkuk, which had been under siege from ISIL for several weeks. This was part of a coalition effort of US, French and Australian aircraft which provided enough water for Amerli for two days and enough food for four days.

The RAF have also carried out intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions to better understand the situation on the ground. Between 13 and 16 August, 10 surveillance sorties were undertaken by UK Tornado GR4 aircraft. On 30 and 31 August, a further Tornado sortie flew a surveillance mission in support of the aid drops to Amerli. A UK Rivet Joint aircraft has also been deployed to improve our understanding. A Voyager aircraft has provided support to these operations through air-to-air refuelling.

In response to requests from the Iraqi Government and the KRG we have also taken part in international efforts to help the Iraqi authorities contain and push back ISIL. UK C-17 and C-130 transport aircraft have delivered to the KRG ammunition and equipment from other nations, including small arms and rocket-propelled grenades with which the Kurdish security forces are already familiar. We are also gifting UK non-lethal equipment, including helmets and body armour, to the KRG. These flights transited through Baghdad for inspection and approval by the Iraqi Government and the deliveries have been supported by a small operational liaison and reconnaissance team deployed to Erbil to support the move and transfer of the equipment. We have been joined in these supply flights by other countries, including the Canadians. The US is co-ordinating delivery of these supplies through military and State Department personnel in Iraq, and we will continue to liaise with them and the KRG's Ministry of Peshmerga through our own military and Foreign and Commonwealth Office representatives in Erbil. Our support has not involved troops in a combat role on the ground.

Lt General Sir Simon Mayall, currently the defence senior adviser for the middle east, has also been appointed as the Government's security envoy to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. His role will be to assess what other needs the Kurds have and where the UK can assist. He has spent the last week in Iraq, and has been co-ordinating closely with Iraqi authorities, holding meetings in Baghdad as well as Erbil.

As the situation develops I will continue to keep the House informed of defence activities.

5.3 Early Day Motions

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DISPLACED PEOPLE IN IRAQ

EDM 449 (session 2016-17)

13 September 2016

Jim Shannon

That this House condemns the human rights abuse and persecution of Christians, Yazidis and other ethnic groups in Iraq; calls for financial assistance for displaced persons in Kurdistan in Iraq; further calls for a fair distribution of aid from Baghdad to Kurdistan's regional government for the displaced persons; and calls on the Government to make training and equipment available for Kurdistan Regional Peshmerga Army.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE PESHMERGA

EDM 197 (session 2016-17)

13 June 2016

Mary Glendon

That this House notes the vital role played by the Peshmerga in protecting the Kurdistan region in Iraq and in helping to liberate Mosul in due course, as has often been recognised by Ministers and the public; further notes that many thousands of Peshmerga have paid with their lives or suffered often horrific injuries in a fight which is vital to the UK's national interests; agrees with the recent report of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq that deaths from treatable wounds can be reduced by providing mobile medical units, as well as the continued and increased transfer of expertise in demining, and that seriously wounded Peshmerga could recuperate in British hospitals; and urges the Government to discuss with the Kurdistan Regional Government how the UK can provide frontline medical facilities such as a field hospital or field surgical teams, as well as emulating the example of Germany and France in facilitating treatment for a few hundred injured Peshmerga at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham and elsewhere.

US VISA POLICY, BRITISH CITIZENS AND THE KURDISTAN REGION IN IRAQ

EDM 99 (session 2016-17)

25 May 2016

Mary Glendon

That this House entirely accepts that the US has good reason to protect its borders; believes, however, that a recently enacted measure has the unintended consequence of making travel to the US harder for those seeking to build relationships with crucial and joint allies, such as the Kurdistan region in Iraq; notes that those who have visited Iraq, and several other countries, since 2011 are no longer eligible for the visa waiver scheme and have to apply for a visa; further notes that there are

case-by-case exemptions for those who have visited the Kurdistan region and Iraq for governments, humanitarian bodies, the media and for legitimate business purposes; regrets the inconvenience caused to UK parliamentarians who have visited the Kurdistan region, an ideological and military bulwark against Daesh, or those who have, for instance, voluntarily provided vital medical operations; is concerned that the new rule could discourage people, whose choice of visiting Kurdistan is discretionary, from participating in a wide variety of mutually beneficial commercial and cultural activities; and urges the US authorities to carefully monitor the implementation of this rule and review it as soon as possible with a view to repealing it.

6. Press releases

Foreign Secretary statement on the Kurdistan Regional Government's intention to hold a referendum on independence from Iraq

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office
12 June 2017**

In a statement the Foreign Secretary said,

We note the announcement by the government of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq regarding a referendum on independence. We understand the aspirations of the Kurdish people and continue to support them politically, culturally and economically within Iraq. But a referendum at this time will distract from the more urgent priorities of defeating Daesh, stabilising liberated areas and addressing the long-term political issues that led to Daesh's rise. Any referendum or political process towards independence must be agreed with the Government of Iraq in Baghdad. Unilateral moves towards independence would not be in the interests of the people of Kurdistan Region, Iraq or of wider regional stability.

The UK supports a stable, democratic and unified Iraq, one that is able to provide the security, jobs and healthcare and education all Iraqis want and deserve. We urge all parties to engage in dialogue to deliver a better future for their people on the basis of the Iraqi Constitution.

7. Further reading

Library Briefing Papers

Syria and Iraq: update June 2017

Commons Briefing Paper CBP-8011
23 June 2017

Syria and Iraq since the cruise missile attacks

Commons Briefing Paper CBP-7945
2 May 2017

Committee publications

UK Government policy on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Eighth Report of Session 2014–15
House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee
HC 564
21 January 2015

Chronology of key events

Iraq Kurdistan profile – timeline

BBC News Online
1 August 2015

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