

Statement to Parliament: Foreign Secretary's statement on Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and update on the campaign against Daesh

Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will make a statement updating the House on the campaign against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

But I should like to begin by informing the House that I called the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mr Zarif, this morning to discuss the case of Mrs Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. I expressed my anxiety about her suffering and the ordeal of her family and I repeated my hope for a swift solution.

I also voiced my concern at the suggestion emanating from one branch of the Iranian judiciary that my remarks to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee last week had some bearing on Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case.

The UK government has no doubt that she was on holiday in Iran when she was arrested last year – and that was the sole purpose of her visit.

My point was that I disagreed with the Iranian view that training journalists was a crime, not that I wanted to lend any credence to Iranian allegations that Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe had been engaged in such activity. I accept that my remarks could have been clearer in that respect and I'm glad to provide this clarification.

I'm sure the House will join me in paying tribute to the tireless campaigning of Mr Ratcliffe on behalf of his wife and we will not relent in our efforts to help all our consular cases in Iran.

Mr Zarif told me that any recent developments in the case had no link to my testimony last week and he would continue to seek a solution on humanitarian grounds. I will visit Iran in the coming weeks where I will discuss all our consular cases.

I turn now to the campaign against Daesh.

In the summer of 2014, Daesh swept down the Tigris and Euphrates valleys, occupying thousands of square miles of Iraqi territory, pillaging cities, massacring and enslaving minorities, and seeking to impose by pitiless violence a demented vision of an Islamist utopia.

Daesh had gathered strength in eastern Syria, using the opportunity created by that country's civil war to seize oilfields and carve out a base from which to launch their assault on Iraq. Today, I can tell the House that Daesh have been rolled back on every battlefield.

Thanks to the courage and resolve of Iraq's Security Forces, our partners in

Syria, and the steadfast action of the 73 members of the Global Coalition, including this country,

Daesh have lost 90% of the territory they once held in Iraq and Syria – including Raqqa, their erstwhile capital – and 6 million people have been freed from their rule.

When my Rt Hon Friend the former Defence Secretary last updated the House in July, the biggest city in northern Iraq, Mosul, had just been liberated.

Since then, Iraqi forces have broken Daesh's grip on the towns of Tal Afar and Hawija and cleared the terrorists from all but a relatively small area near the Syrian border, demonstrating how the false and failed 'caliphate' is crumbling before our eyes.

The House will join me in paying tribute to the men and women of the British armed forces, who have been vital to every step of the advance.

Over 600 British soldiers are in Iraq where they have helped to train 50,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces and the RAF has delivered 1,352 air strikes against Daesh in Iraq and 263 in Syria – more than any other air force apart from the United States. I turn now to Syria where, on 20 October, the Global Coalition confirmed the fall of Raqqa after 3 years of brutal occupation.

The struggle was long and hard; I acknowledge the price that has been paid by the Coalition's partner forces on the ground and, most especially, by the civilian population of Raqqa. Throughout the military operation, the Department for International Development has been working with partners in Raqqa Province to supply food, water, health care and shelter wherever possible.

On 22 October, my Rt Hon Friend the International Development Secretary [announced another £10 million of UK aid](#), in order to clear the landmines sown by Daesh, restock hospitals and mobile surgical units with essential medicines, and provide clean water for 15,000 people.

The permanent defeat of Daesh in Syria – by which I mean removing the conditions that allowed them to seize large areas in the first place – will require a political settlement and that must include a transition away from the Asad regime that did so much to create the conditions for the rise of Daesh.

How such a settlement is reached is, of course, a matter for Syrians themselves and we will continue to support the work of the United Nations Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, and the Geneva process.

I am encouraged by how America and Russia have stayed in close contact over the future of Syria and we must continue to emphasise to the Kremlin that instead of blindly supporting a murderous regime – even after UN investigators have found its forces guilty of using sarin nerve gas, most recently at Khan Shaykoun in April – Russia should join the international community and support a negotiated settlement in Syria under the auspices of

the UN.

Turning to Iraq, more than 2 million people have returned to their homes in areas liberated from Daesh, including 265,000 who have gone back to Mosul. Britain is providing over £200 million of practical life-saving assistance for Iraqi civilians.

We are helping to clear the explosives that were laid by Daesh, restore water supplies that the terrorists sabotaged, and give clean water to 200,000 people and health care to 115,000.

Now that Daesh is close to defeat in Iraq, the country's leaders must resolve the political tensions that – in part – paved the way for its advance in 2014.

The Kurdistan Region held a unilateral referendum on independence on 25 September, a decision we did not support. Since then, Masoud Barzani has stepped down as President of the Kurdistan Regional Government and Iraqi forces have reasserted federal control over disputed territory, including the city of Kirkuk.

We are working alongside our allies to reduce tensions in northern Iraq; rather than reopen old conflicts, the priority must be to restore the stability, prosperity and national unity that is the right of every Iraqi.

A general election will take place in Iraq next May, creating an opportunity for parties to set out their respective visions of a country that overcomes sectarianism and serves every citizen, including Kurds.

But national reconciliation will require justice, and justice demands that Daesh are held accountable for their atrocities in Iraq and elsewhere. That is why I acted over a year ago – in concert with the Government of Iraq – to launch the global campaign to bring Daesh to justice.

In September, the [Security Council unanimously adopted UN Resolution 2379](#), a British-drafted text – co-sponsored by 46 countries – that will establish a UN investigation to help gather and preserve the evidence of Daesh crimes in Iraq.

Every square mile of territory that Daesh have lost is 1 square mile less for them to exploit and tax and plunder, and the impending destruction of the so-called 'caliphate' will reduce their ability to fund terrorism abroad and attract new recruits.

Yet Daesh will still try to inspire attacks by spreading their hateful ideology in cyberspace even after they have lost every inch of their physical domain.

That's why Britain leads the Global Coalition's efforts to counter Daesh propaganda, through a Communications Cell based here in London, and Daesh's total propaganda output has fallen by half since 2015.

But social media companies can and must do more, particularly to speed up the

detection and removal of dangerous material and prevent it from being uploaded in the first place, hence my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister co-hosted an event at the UN General Assembly in September on how to stop terrorists from using the internet.

The government has always made clear that any British nationals who join Daesh have chosen to make themselves legitimate targets for the Coalition. We expect that most foreign fighters will die in the terrorist domain they opted to serve but some may surrender or try to come home, including to the UK.

As the government has previously said, anyone who returns to this country after taking part in the conflict in Syria or Iraq must expect to be investigated for reasons of national security. While foreign fighters face the consequences of their actions, the valour and sacrifice of the armed forces of many nations – including our own – has prevented a terrorist entity from taking root in the heart of the Middle East.

I commend this statement to the House.

Press release: New laws to set out UK and Wales trading future

The UK Government took an important step to minimise disruption and offer certainty to Welsh businesses and trading partners today taking forward the next two Brexit Bills to Parliament.

The UK Government has been working closely with the Welsh Government at all levels to ensure trade policy works for Wales and that businesses there will continue to benefit from existing trade deals after the UK leaves the EU.

The Bills will look to support Wales' growing exports, 61% of which went to non-EU countries in 2016, and foreign investment. In the last year alone, foreign investment created over 2,500 jobs from 85 new projects.

Key measures in the Trade Bill include provisions for the UK to implement existing EU trade agreements, ensuring UK companies can continue to access major government contracts in other countries and creating a new trade remedies body to defend UK businesses against unfair and injurious trade practices.

Further tax-related elements of the UK's trade policy will be legislated in the Treasury's Customs Bill – Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill – as part of the creation of a new UK tariff regime. This includes the trade remedies and unilateral trade preferences which provide preferential trade access to UK markets for developing countries.

Following a recent meeting with the Welsh Government in Cardiff, the International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox welcomed the commitments as part of the new legislation to work with the Welsh Government to create trade policies which work for Wales' businesses and consumers.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

There has never been a better time for Welsh companies to trade and export overseas and this Bill will provide businesses with stability and certainty to continue doing so.

We now have the opportunity to shape our own ambitious trade and investment opportunities in Europe and beyond, and put Wales and Britain firmly at the forefront of global trade and investment.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox said:

This Bill will ensure that we support Wales' extensive global trade, reaching out to growing international markets, with 61% of its exports going beyond the EU, while supporting its existing trade partners.

We want Wales to trade across the world on a level playing field and this Bill provides that, enabling us to continue our existing trade agreements and manage our own customs for the whole of the UK.

Trade Bill

The Trade Bill laid in Parliament today will:

- Create powers to assist in the transition of over 40 existing trade agreements between the EU and other countries;
- Enable the UK to have continued access to £1.3 trillion worth of government contracts and procurement opportunities in 47 countries – by becoming an independent member of the Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA);
- Establish a new independent UK body, the Trade Remedies Authority, to defend UK businesses against trade fluctuations and unfair trade practices; and
- Ensure the UK Government has the legal abilities for gathering and sharing trade information, as evidence to support UK businesses against surges in imports and unfair practices.

Customs Bill

The government also laid resolutions for the Customs Bill, which will enter Parliament shortly. The Bill will allow the government to create a standalone customs regime and amend the VAT and excise regimes including allowing the government to:

- Charge and vary customs duty on goods;
- Specify which goods pay what duty;
- Set preferential or additional duties in certain circumstances – for example, to support developing countries; and
- Maintain a functioning movement of goods from the day we leave the EU by continuing the VAT and excise regimes in line with the final deal reached in negotiations.

[Press release: Third-year engineering apprentices graduate to roles in Dstl](#)

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory's (Dstl's) third-year engineering apprentices have recently graduated with every single apprentice being retained by Dstl and going on to take up roles across the business.

As the recently graduated apprentices all go on to jobs within the organisation, 20 more apprentices will be joining the scheme, taking the total number currently on the programme to 53.

The 5 apprentices who successfully completed the course; Cameron Fitze, Ben Churchill, Jamie Moore, Ewan Walker and Zac Hall, have [collected awards](#) at a number of competitions, including the prestigious Tom Nevard Memorial Competition.

The team also worked with schools to talk about the benefits of doing an apprenticeship, resulting in more than 100 applicants for the 2017 intake of engineering apprentices.

Zac Hall, 20, winner of Dstl's apprentice of the year (mechanical), said:

It's been a really good past 3 years and I've learned lots. I've come from not knowing what engineering really was, to being able to produce parts that help people out on the front line. Winning the award has been amazing – it just shows that the hard work that I've been putting in has paid off.

Dstl's outgoing Chief Executive, Jonathan Lyle, said:

The best bit of my job is to celebrate the achievements of people like this. We're absolutely committed to our apprentice scheme and it's fantastic that all 5 graduating apprentices have secured roles at Dstl. The Ministry of Defence and our other customers need the very best skills.

Dstl's apprentice scheme, now in its tenth year, brings in people of all ages and backgrounds, from school leavers to those looking for a second career or a change of direction. Applications for Dstl's 2018 apprenticeship scheme will open in January 2018. For more information, visit [Civil Service Jobs](#) or [Dstl's Facebook page](#).

Press release: Exercise Tempest tests the Environment Agency flood response ahead of winter

More than 300 metres of temporary flood defence barrier, drones and new visual mapping technology are being put to the test today (7th November) as the Environment Agency continues preparation for the winter ahead.

Exercise Tempest will see frontline staff test out temporary barriers in Stratford-upon-Avon – birthplace of William Shakespeare – for the first time. The exercise will test working arrangements with the local council and partners so that barriers can be put up quickly and safely when needed to help to protect properties on the waterfront from flooding.

Staff on-site and in the Environment Agency's incident room in Lichfield will also be working together to test new visual mapping technology which will provide better intelligence about flood damage and impacts on the ground. This includes drones that teams can use to survey wider flood-hit areas, sending footage via a live feed, to the Environment Agency incident room.

Up and down the country, the Environment Agency is prepared to take action this winter wherever it is needed.

Sir James Bevan, chief executive of the Environment Agency, said:

This test exercise is one of many across the country to make sure we are ready for winter. We have 6,500 trained staff ready to respond to flooding and we're making the most of new kit and technology.

Since the flooding of winter 2015/16, the Environment Agency has

invested £12.5 million in new equipment including an additional 20 miles of temporary barriers, 500,000 sandbags and 250 pumps. The use of drones will also allow us to have a clearer idea of flood damage on the ground.

Floods Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

This exercise is a brilliant example of work taking place across the country to make sure we are fully prepared for any potential flooding this winter.

The use of new hi-spec equipment such as drones and live 'visual mapping' to show flood affected areas will be a huge asset to flood prevention teams.

The investment we have made in new technology, portable barriers and other equipment forms part of the £2.5 billion we are spending across the country up until 2021 to better protect over 300,000 properties.

Temporary barriers are just one of the ways the Environment Agency aims to better protect people and properties. But it's important to remember people can never be fully protected against flooding, which is why people are being urged to [go online](#) and check their flood risk by entering their postcode, and find out what they can do to protect themselves and their property when flooding hits.

More than 1.2 million people are signed up to the Environment Agency's free flood warning service, which sends a message directly by voice message, text or email when a flood warning is issued.

From 2015 to 2021, Government is investing £2.5 billion in flood and coastal erosion risk management projects which will reduce the risk of flooding from rivers, the sea, groundwater and surface water for at least 300,000 homes.

[News story: Pubs Code Adjudicator tenant survey](#)

The Pubs Code Adjudicator launches a tenant survey which is live until the end of November.

The Pubs Code Adjudicator (PCA) has commissioned an independent research company, GfK, to undertake a survey of the tied pub tenants whose pub-owning

businesses are one of the six covered by the Pubs Code. The purpose of the survey is to assess tenants' awareness of the Pubs Code and its provisions; and to get their views on how it is working in practice for them.

GfK will be surveying a representative sample of tied pub tenants throughout November. The survey will be a telephone interview and should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Not all tenants will be contacted, but all six of the pub-owning businesses support the aims of the survey and would encourage tied pub tenants to take part if approached.

All responses will be confidential and non-attributable. The results of the research will be published by the PCA. We expect this to be in the New Year.