Military Action in Syria

I would like to begin by stating that a Government's first duty is to protect and provide security for its citizens. Having served in three conflicts myself and experienced first hand the difficulties of war, I hope you will appreciate that voting to extend our military action to Syria from Iraq is not a decision that I have taken lightly.

I have done so though not just because Daesh (also known as ISIL) operate in both Syria and Iraq, but because doing so is, I believe, an essential part of a wider overarching strategy to defeat them. It is important to explain that military action constitutes just one pillar of a four pillar strategy and that I am only too aware that military action on its own is unlikely to be effective.

I would like to explain the four pillars of the strategy in more detail;

Firstly, our counter-extremism strategy means we have a comprehensive plan to prevent and foil plots at home. After all, the threat that Daesh poses is unprecedented. In the last 12 months, our police and security services have disrupted no fewer than seven terrorist plots to attack the UK, every one of which was either linked to or inspired by Daesh. We have of course already seen the lives of British hostages taken and the worst terrorist attack against British people since 7/7 on the beaches of Tunisia. For this reason, I do not support the view that by somehow seeking to degrade Daesh's ability to plan such events from their safe haven in Syria we are opening ourselves up more likely to attack. Daesh are determined to attack us whether we extend airstrikes or not. Because of this I am in no doubt that it is in our national interest for action to be taken to stop them both home and abroad.

The second pillar is our continued support for the diplomatic and political process to work with our allies following the recent unanimous UN Security Council resolution 2249. The resolution states that Daesh "constitutes a global and unprecedented threat to international peace and security" and calls for member states to take "all necessary measures" to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by Daesh. Somewhat crucially, it also says that we should "eradicate the safe haven they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria".

The third pillar is military action. We all accept that peace is a process not an event and I can only reiterate that I agree it cannot be achieved through military action alone. That said I do believe that the strategy must start with degrading and defeating Daesh. Precision airstrikes are a means of achieving this aim. You will be aware that upon the request for assistance from the Iraqi Government, British aircraft are already operating over the skies of Iraq. However with Daesh headquarters in Raqqa in Syria, it is illogical not to extend operations there as well, especially since Daesh do not recognise the International border between Iraq and Syria.

The final pillar of our strategy is humanitarian support and longer-term stabilisation. Surpassed only by the USA, Britain has so far donated over Â£1.1 billion and would contribute at least another Â£1 billion for post-conflict reconstruction to support a new Syrian Government when they emerge. The initial priorities would be protection, security, stabilisation and confidence building measures including meeting basic humanitarian needs,

such as education, health and shelter, and of course helping refugees to return. Over time the focus would shift to longer-term rebuilding of Syria's shattered infrastructure, harnessing the expertise of the International Financial Institutions and the private sector.

Having, therefore, been reassured that there is a comprehensive strategic plan that will deliver security for the Syrian people, I supported the Government. Whilst I appreciate that there are varyingÂ viewpoints onthis sensitive issue, I hope at least that I have gone some way to explaining my own feelings on the matter and why following the UN resolution we have a duty to act.