



# Westminster Round Up | February 2019

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## Focus points

### **06.02.19 NGOs condemn lack of transparency over British arms exports to Yemen and beyond**

During the evidence session, the NGO representatives expressed significant concerns with lack of transparency around arms export license, especially to Middle Eastern countries. They expressed particular concern about arms exports to those involved in Yemen. The RWP commissioned a report by King's Policy Institute last year, which found that the UK is not benefiting significantly from the relationship with Saudi Arabia on the back of their arms exports to this country.

A video of the evidence session can be seen [here](#).

### **15.02.19 New medal recognises changes in warfare**

A new medal has been launched to recognise the efforts of those who engaged in the campaign against Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. The medal will also be awarded to those who operated outside the traditional areas of operations, such as drone operators. This marks a change towards recognising new ways of engaging in warfare.

## Highlights

### **11.02.19 Foreign Secretary describes changes in approach to ISIS**

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Jeremy Hunt, the Foreign Secretary, emphasised that while there have been significant territorial successes against IS, the group remains and is increasingly turning towards guerrilla tactics. As such, the UK military campaign against them will continue, along with wider efforts to defeat their ideology. He also echoed commitments made by the Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, that the Syrian Democratic Forces – who have been instrumental in the fight against IS – will continue to receive British support. Hunt concluded that, in spite of NGO reports of high casualties among civilians, the intervention had been a success.

### **13.02.19 Minister of State for DFID assigns blame for Yemeni suffering on Houthis**

Asked when the UK government would stop selling arms to Saudi Arabia, Alistair Burt, joint minister for DFID and FCO, responded by saying that the UK provides much aid, and argued that the suffering is the fault of the Houthi insurgency, not the Saudi coalition. This is contrary to evidence from NGO and UN agencies – as well as a recent House of Lords report (see below) – which shows the Saudi-led coalition has been perpetuating the suffering of civilians through its air campaign.

### **16.02.19 House of Lords International Relations Committee finds government in breach of IHL over Saudi arms sales**

The committee argues that the high likelihood of significant civilian casualties caused by British arms exported to Saudi Arabia puts the UK government on the wrong side of International Humanitarian Law. You can find the committee's full report [here](#). The Remote Warfare Programme [recently examined](#) the legal complexities involved in providing assistance to states that

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may be liable for IHL abuses, demonstrating the challenges associated with new forms of warfare.

### **18.02.19 Defence Secretary questioned on lack of fiscal clarification in MDP**

Nia Griffiths MP, Shadow Defence Secretary, clarified that the Public Accounts Committee has found that there has been little progress in solving the affordability crisis at the heart of the MoD's budget. Many had hoped that the Modernising Defence Programme would address this gap, yet no concrete clarifications were made. Gavin Williamson argued that the government has made many savings and will continue to do so. Last summer, the RWP ran a [blog series](#) arguing that greater transparency was needed around remote warfare capabilities such as drone technology and special forces to better link spending to strategic priorities.

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#### **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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