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Westminster Round-Up | May 2018

May saw an important milestone established as the [government admitted](#) – for the first time – that a civilian was killed in Syria during British operations against ISIS. RWP, [civil society groups](#), [MPs](#), and [current and former serving military personnel](#) have been urging the government to become more transparent about the likelihood of civilian casualties, given that the RAF and Iraqi security forces have been fighting in some of the [most intense urban environments](#) since the Second World War. This recognition was a positive step forward in bringing some transparency into Britain's contemporary military engagements and removing the unrealistic pressure that this approach is placing on British Service Personnel. Such transparency would not only benefit this British public, but [also the military itself](#).

Focus Points

National Security Advisor warns Russia is not the only threat | The House of Commons Defence Committee (HCDC) held a [long-awaited hearing](#) of National Security Advisor Mark Sedwill, who warned that while Russia poses a real threat, we must not forget other challenges such as terrorism.

Ministry of Defence (MoD) faces possible £20bn gap | The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has [released a report](#) which drew attention to a possible £20.8bn gap in the MoD's Defence Equipment Plan. The MoD is relying on the Modernising Defence Plan to fix this gap, which – according to the PAC – isn't likely to happen. Follow RWP's analysis of the possible implications of the MDP in our [upcoming blog series](#).

Government statement on civilian fatality in Syria | Secretary of State for Defence Gavin Williamson [publicly admitted](#) that a civilian had been killed in the UK's counter-ISIS operations in Syria. This marks the first time the government

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disclosed a civilian casualty as a result of British airstrikes in Operation Shader. Such revelations are hindered by the UK's anachronistic lack of transparency for its operations.

House of Commons

Government criticised for allowing countries to investigate themselves

| 21.05.2018 | The UK should not rely on countries such as Saudi Arabia to investigate their own possible human rights violations, according to Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry.

EU Foreign Affairs Council discuss Syria, Iran and Russia

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| 22.05.2018 | Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson [attended an EU meeting](#) in which possible responses to re-surg-ing state-based threats were discussed in the light of chemical attacks in Syria and Salisbury. State-based threats were declared one of the primary strategic threats to the UK in the [2018 National Security Capability Review](#).

Committee News

Foreign Affairs Committee holds evidence session on humanitarian intervention

| 01.05.2018 | In connection to April's airstrikes in Syria, the FAC has [launched an inquiry](#) in to the meaning of the Responsibility to Protect norm and humanitarian interventions. Academics from SOAS, King's College and Cambridge were called as witnesses.

Government asked to provide clarify on Overseas Development Aid (ODA)

| 01.05.2018 | In the [final oral evidence session](#) of the International Development Committee's enquiry into the administration of ODA, Penny Mordaunt MP attempted to clarify what classifies ODA, and how it is being utilised by other departments than DFID. Read more about possible military implications of development funds in our [upcoming blog post](#) on the Conflict, Stability, and Security Fund.

More realism in the Middle East?

| 02.05.2018 | A year on from the launch of a report titled “the Middle East: Time for New Realism”, the International Relations Committee set up [a hearing of ministers](#) to understand the year’s development in the Middle East.

The UK will lose influence over European security after Brexit

| 14.05.2018 | The EU External Affairs Sub-Committee [warns](#) that Brexit will have a negative effect on the UK’s influence and leadership over European Common Security and Defence Missions. These have previously been a significant outlet for British leadership abroad.

Possible cuts to the Royal Marines would be “totally at odds with strategic reality”

| 16.05.2018 | The HCDC published its 6th special report on possible cuts to the Royal Marines, after previous reports have referred to such cuts as “militarily illiterate”. The new report argues that, if anything, the Royal Marines should be expanded. RWP has raised similar concerns in the context of the UK Special Forces: The Marines account for 50% of the UKSF recruitment pool, who themselves have been described as underfunded and understaffed.

Williamson unwilling to confirm more troops to Afghanistan

| 22.05.18 | After several media outlets reported that Secretary for Defence Gavin Williamson had written the Prime Minister to propose an increase in British forces in Afghanistan, Williamson stated in a hearing by the Defence Committee that he was unable to confirm whether he had done so. He did confirm that all deployments are “constantly under review.”

House of Lords

House of Lords discuss Idlib and the coalition against ISIS

| 09.05.2018 | The House of Lords discussed the horrific Crimes Against Humanity in Idlib, Syria, the complications posed by non-state actors operating in the city, and the eventual success of the coalition of over 70 countries who battled ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

Lords examine how influence of different countries is negated in Syria

| 15.05.2018 | The House of Lords continued to express their interest in the conflict in Syria in this debate, where the focus was how the UK should influence the roles of other countries in the war-torn country. [Read it here.](#)

Image credit: Wikimedia.

House of Lords examine how to end conflicts in Syria and Yemen

| 21.05.2018 | The Lords and Baronesses examined what pressure is being applied to Iran and Saudi Arabia to force these to end conflicts in Syria and Yemen. They also emphasised the importance of political settlements. [Read the debate here.](#)

Government Announcements

Secretary for Defence emphasises the importance of Allies

| MoD 04.05.18 | During a training exercise with the Joint Expeditionary Force (consisting of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden) Gavin Williamson emphasised the importance of allies in the face of diverse threats, including chemical attacks such as the one in Salisbury.

The Government responds to critical independent review of CSSF

| FCO 10.05.18 | The review by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) highlighted lack of MEL mechanisms in CSSF programmes. The Government response accepted most of the criticisms and methodically addressed how they will improve on each of the recommendations of the report.

Army at its smallest in 200 years

| MoD 17.05.18 | The MoD released their quarterly statistics on Service Personnel in mid-May. It showed that the army is smaller than it has been for over 200 years.

The importance of effective monitoring of civilian casualties

| FCO 22.05.18 | In the same month that the UK admitted its first civilian casualty in the Coalition against Iraq and Syria – likely not actually the first based on the amount of civilians killed by coalitions attacks overall and the UK's considerable contribution – the UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN heavily criticised indiscriminate attacks by Syrian and Russian governments, including through weapons such as barrel bombs. He emphasised the importance of respecting civilian lives and correctly monitoring their deaths.

Monthly update on strikes against ISIS

| MoD 25.05.18 | The MoD released its [monthly account](#) of air strikes against ISIS members in Syria and Iraq. It gave a brief description of four strikes.

To Watch in June

What?	Where?	When?
Oral questions on Defence	Main Chamber, parliament	Monday 11th June, 2.30pm
Lords Oral Questions: Sustaining the UK's standalone capacity to manufacture helicopters as part of a Modernising Defence Programme	Lords Main Chamber	Thursday 14th June
2nd Reading, Armed Forces (Statute of Limitation) Bill	Main Chamber, parliament	Friday 15th June
2nd Reading, Armed Forces (Volunteer Reserve) Bill	Main Chamber, parliament	Friday 15th June

Oral Questions, Foreign
and Commonwealth
Office

Main Chamber,
parliament

Tuesday 26th June

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Contact

Unit 503
101 Clerkenwell Road London
EC1R 5BX
Charity no. 299436
Company no. 2260840

Email us

020 3559 6745

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