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Briefing: Collaboration between Assad and Daesh undermines the UK's fight against terrorism

Recently obtained information, detailed within this briefing, reveals extensive military and financial coordination between Daesh and the Assad regime in Syria. This information affirms that **Assad is not a trustworthy player in the fight against terrorism and that his role as an enabler and implicit supporter of the group must be addressed in order to make international efforts against the terrorist group more effective.** Given the UK's vested resources in tackling Daesh, including through its domestic counter-terrorism efforts as well as through military involvement in the US-led coalition against Daesh in Iraq and Syria, **Assad's cooperation with Daesh must be met with a strong and bold reaction from the UK.**

Assad-Daesh Cooperation

- 1) Documents obtained by Sky News [reveal](#) cooperation between Assad and Daesh which has been ongoing for years. These documents highlight, among other things:
 - Military coordination between Assad and Daesh, for example through arrangements for Daesh to retreat from areas prior to aerial bombardment by the Assad regime.
 - Economic cooperation between Assad and Daesh, for example in the form of trading oil for fertiliser.
 - The Assad regime's recent 'recapture' of Palmyra in March 2016, over which some in the West [rejoiced](#), was a planned theatrical between Assad and Daesh. In this sense, we would like to point to our March 2016 briefing to Parliament, in we specifically [argued](#):
[A]s the world 'rejoices' over Assad's take-over of Palmyra from Daesh, it should be recalled that the same Assad handed Palmyra over to Daesh in May 2015 on a silver platter. At that time, the regime's loss of Palmyra to Daesh played into the narrative of the ever-expanding threat of terrorism. Now, Assad's recapture of Palmyra represents yet another coy to establish himself as a reliable partner in the fight against the group.
- 2) Documents obtained following a US and UK raid in 2015 on a Daesh commander also [revealed](#), as reported in April 2016, that Assad has been purchasing up to £\$40 million worth of oil from Daesh per month since the group's takeover of some of the major oil fields in eastern Syria in 2013.
- 3) Of course, these findings must be interpreted alongside similar findings of Assad's role in the creation and expansion of Daesh in Syria, which have been reported to the UK Parliament in prior briefings ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), and most important of which include:
 - In 2011 the Assad regime [granted amnesty](#) to prisoners with known militant and extremist tendencies with the knowledge that upon release, they would contribute to the militarisation of the Syrian conflict. Many of these released prisoners can now be found among Daesh and al-Nusra leadership in Syria.
 - Assad continues to attack the ground troops which the West relies upon in the fight against Daesh (i.e. the moderate Syrian opposition). Simultaneously, Assad has largely [refrained](#) from attacking Daesh-controlled territory, a strategy which has allowed Daesh's expansion into areas that are lost by the rebel groups.

Violations of international law

Assad's cooperation with Daesh constitutes a blatant violation of the following UN Security Council Resolutions:

- [Resolution 2170](#) (15 August 2014): '[A]ll States shall ensure that no funds, financial assets or economic resources are made available, directly or indirectly for the benefit of ISIL, ANF, or any other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida'.
- [Resolution 2199](#) (12 February 2015): '*Condemns* any engagement in direct or indirect trade, in particular of oil and oil products, and modular refineries and related material, with ISIL, ANF and any other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities designated as associated with Al-Qaida'.
- [Resolution 2249](#) (20 November 2015): 'Calls upon Member States that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures, in compliance with international law ... to redouble and coordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL also known as Da'esh as well as ANF, and all other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with Al Qaeda'.

These findings should make it clear to UK policy makers, once and for all, that:

- 1) Assad cannot be an ally in the fight against Daesh;
- 2) Eliminating Daesh's terrorist threat cannot be successful until Assad's role as the creator and enabler of this group's existence in Syria is effectively dealt with.

Alternative to Daesh and Assad

Outside Kurdish controlled areas, **the moderate Syrian opposition represents the only credible ground force that can effectively help in the international coalition's fight against Daesh.** Despite being targeted by Assad, Russia, Iranian and Hezbollah militias, and Daesh itself, the moderate opposition has proven willing and capable of fighting Daesh in a coordinated and effective manner. It does face significant obstacles, however, mainly through the Assad regime's aerial bombardments, which were also aided in large part by [Russian](#) air attacks.

In order for the moderate Syrian opposition to be able to sustain its fight against Daesh, the UK must work with its allies to ensure that:

- 1) These groups are protected from Assad regime air attacks, for example through a no-bombing zone.
OR
- 2) Moderate opposition groups are provided means of self-defence which allow them to defend themselves from air attacks by the Assad regime, including through the provision of anti-aircraft missiles.

By ensuring that the Syrian moderate opposition forces are protected from the Assad regime's indiscriminate aerial bombardment, the West can find its strongest allies within these groups in its fight against Daesh.

Rethink Rebuild Society is a Manchester-based non-profit organisation established in 2011 to campaign for Syrian issues within the British landscape. We have established ourselves as the leading Syrian advocacy group within the UK, working with policy makers and the media to affect Syria-related decision-making at all levels of government and to shape the Syrian narrative as it is understood by the wider British public.