

## FCO FOI Reference 0649-17 – Digest of Information

**From:** [Redacted] Ministry of Defence Middle East Operations Directorate

**Sent:** 10 January 2017 10:07

**To:** [Redacted] Middle East and North Africa Department

**Subject:** 20170110 - PQ-OS

[Redacted],

As discussed this has now been agreed at 1\* level and by SpAds but the SofS hasn't signed it off himself:

***To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to his comments on the Andrew Marr BBC TV programme on 11 December 2016, on Yemen, what the evidential basis is for his statement that Houthis in Yemen are supported by al-Qaeda.***

Terrorist organisations such as AQ and Daesh prosper in ungoverned environments where they have the freedom to develop their capabilities. This remains a particular concern in Yemen where AQAP are benefitting from the continued instability that results from Houthi aggression.

### Background

On the Andrew Marr show SofS said the following:

*"What the coalition is doing there is restoring the legitimate government of Yemen, in dealing with the Houthi rebels, who by the way are supported by al Qaeda, a very direct threat to this country, so we have an interest in seeing this civil war brought to an end and the Houthis defeated".*

[Redacted]

Thanks,

[Redacted]

Updated 11 January 2017

### YEMEN SCRIPT

#### **UK OBJECTIVES**

- **To de-escalate the conflict, encourage all parties to participate in political negotiations to find a peaceful solution (FCO)**
- **To help address Yemen's urgent humanitarian needs and contribute to effective stabilisation and recovery (DFID)**
- **To reduce the ability of Yemen-based terrorists to conduct attacks against the UK and UK interests in Yemen and the region (FCO)**
- **To support Yemen's political transition and longer term stability, in the context of wider regional security (FCO/DFID)**

## **TOP LINES**

- [...]
- We remain concerned by the terrorist threat in Yemen, including the presence of AQAP and Daesh-Yemen (Daesh-Y). Long term instability may increase the risk that AQAP and Daesh-Yemen are able to consolidate their support base and capabilities. Countering such terrorist threats remains a top priority and we continue to work with regional and international partners to tackle the threat.
- [...]

## **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

### **POLITICAL**

[...]

#### **London Quadrilateral Communiqué**

*The Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, USA, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates met on 19 July in London to review the situation in Yemen, following the resumption of UN led-peace talks in Kuwait on 16 July.*

[...]

*The Ministers agreed that the conflict in Yemen should not threaten Yemen's neighbours and reaffirmed that the re-establishment of an inclusive government was the only means to combat effectively terrorist groups like Al-Qaida and Da'esh and to address successfully the humanitarian and economic crisis. Ministers also called for the unconditional and immediate release of all political prisoners.*

[...]

#### **Houthi aggression towards GoY and Saudi Arabia**

This round of the conflict began in September 2014, when Houthi rebels overran Yemen's capital, Sana'a, in collusion with Ali Abdullah Saleh, the previous President, and with the reported backing of Iran. Their aim was to overthrow Yemen's legitimate Government. In January 2015, President Hadi, the serving leader, was forced to flee his own capital for the safety of Aden, two months later the Houthis attacked the south, striking as far as the outskirts of Aden and forcing President Hadi to flee his country altogether.

The position when President Hadi was forced to flee was potentially disastrous. Yemen is a country of 26 million people, more than half of whom are under the age of 18. There is a long-standing presence of al-Qaeda in that country, which has a history of fratricidal bloodshed and chronic instability. At that moment, there was a clear risk that the country would fall into the hands of forces avowedly hostile to

Saudi Arabia, which shares an 800-mile border with Yemen, one that is vulnerable and porous. It was against that background that the Saudis and their allies took a decision to intervene in Yemen in March 2015—a decision that was not only justified, but legally sound. Saudi Arabia and its allies are responding to a crisis that was forced on them and that poses a grave threat to international peace and security.

[...]

## **COUNTER TERRORISM**

### **What is the UK's assessment of the nature of the terrorist threat in Yemen?**

Terrorist organisations such as AQ and Daesh prosper in ungoverned environments where they have the freedom to develop their capabilities. This remains a particular concern in Yemen where AQAP has exploited the continued instability that results from Houthi aggression.

Ultimately, the only sustainable way to counter terrorist activity will be a political settlement and an end to the conflict. The UK is leading international efforts to achieve this.

### **What is the UK doing to respond to the terrorist threat in Yemen?**

Although we have temporarily suspended counter-terrorism capacity building with the Yemeni authorities, we continue to work with regional and international partners to tackle the threat posed by terrorist organisations including AQAP and Daesh-Yemen. For operational reasons we cannot comment in detail on this activity.

### **What about reported links to the Charlie Hebdo attack?**

Reports and content on social media link the Charlie Hebdo attacks to AQAP in Yemen, however this is a matter for those leading the French investigation.

[...]

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Document electronic file name: Minister Ellwood Questions and Answers for IRC

### **Possible Questions from the IRC and relevant answers**

[...]

**6. A major theme of the evidence has been the rise of non-state actors – both positive and negative. A negative non-state actor is, of course, local groups which can then morph into jihadi groups, even allying with ISIL. There does not seem to be any clear way to address this challenge; how do you think that this threat should be managed? Is the answer primarily to bolster national security measures?**

[...]

Libya

- Some extremist militant groups have been able to take advantage of the instability in Libya since 2011, including groups such as al-Qaeda and Daesh. This highlights the importance of a lasting and inclusive political settlement, enabling Libya to build strong and accountable state institutions able sustainably to tackle these threats. The UK has been at the forefront of international support to Libya; promoting political participation, strengthening security, and supporting economic growth. We are working closely with the GNA, the UN and the international community to develop a comprehensive approach to post conflict reconstruction.
- The UK is also working closely with Tunisia and Egypt to strengthen their border security and have led and supported international action to tackle extremism in Libya. We have used existing UN Security Council Resolutions to sanction terrorist groups in Libya, including groups affiliated to Daesh; and on 19 November 2014 the UN Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee listed Libyan terrorist groups Ansar Al-Sharia Benghazi (AAS-B) and Derna (AAS-D). Separately, a domestic UK Proscription Order for AAS-B came into effect on 28 November 2014.

[...]

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[Note: Briefing for Foreign Secretary call with Rex Tillerson]

## **CALL WITH REX TILLERSON: 1 FEBRUARY**

### **STEER**

This is a relationship-building call on Tillerson's first day in office (confirmation expected on 1 February).

[...]

### **BACKGROUND**

[...]

10. **Afghanistan:** [...] Preventing the rise of Daesh or the return of Al Qaeda also requires support to wider Afghan security and the development agenda. [Redacted].

[...]

**Drafted by: Jennifer Cole** [Redacted]

**Cleared by: Jonathan Allen**

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**From:** [Redacted] Middle East and North Africa Directorate

**Sent:** 03 February 2017 11:30

**To:** SOSFA Action (Sensitive) [Foreign Secretary's Office]; [Redacted]

**Cc:** PS Minister Burt - Action (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Arabian Peninsula and Iran Department (Sensitive); Christian Turner (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Martin Reynolds (PPS) (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Neil Crompton \* (Sensitive); PUS Action (Sensitive); DL Yemen Office Network (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Philip Parham \* (Sensitive); Simon Collis \* (Sensitive); [Redacted]

**Subject:** FS Update - Yemen/US/AQAP OFFICIAL\_SENSITIVE

[Redacted],

Please find below update following the media report last night suggesting that a US warship was targeting AQAP in Yemen.

Thanks

[Redacted]

**Yemen/US/AQAP:** Yesterday AP reported Yemen security officials stating that a likely US warship had been firing canons and rockets at AQAP along Yemen's southern coastal areas for the last five days. This report follows US Special Forces last weekend conducting their first publically reported ground operation in Yemen since December 2014. [Redacted]. Further media reporting today quotes local residents and tribal leaders saying there has been no evidence of shelling.

[Freely available AP report: "US Warships targeting Al Qaida with rocket attacks, Yemeni officials say" was attached]

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**From:** [Redacted] Middle East and North Africa Directorate

**Sent:** 29 March 2017 13:12

**To:** SOSFA Action (Sensitive) [Foreign Secretary's Office]

**Cc:** PS Minister Burt - Action (Sensitive); Christian Turner (Sensitive); [Redacted]; MENAD - Yemen Team (Sensitive); Gulf Team (Sensitive); Karen Pierce (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Neil Crompton \* (Sensitive); Martin Reynolds (PPS) (Sensitive); PUS Action (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Tim Torlot (Sensitive); Matthew Rycroft (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Stephen Hickey (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Caroline Hurdall (Sensitive); Samantha Job (Sensitive); Philip Parham \* (Sensitive); [Redacted]

**Subject:** FS Update: Yemen OFFICIAL\_SENSITIVE

Private Secretary,

Please find below an update on Yemen.

[Redacted]

[Starts]

**AQAP Yemen:** AQAP have claimed responsibility for a complex suicide attack against Yemeni forces in Al-Hawatah (just north of Aden) on Monday. 6 soldiers, 4-5 civilians and up to ten militants killed. Rumours that the militants involved had fought previously alongside Yemeni government forces in Mokha. This is not confirmed but reinforces the fluid and complex nature of alliances in Yemen.

[Ends]

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**From:** PRD Action/info (Sensitive) [Parliamentary Relations Department]  
**Sent:** 20 March 2017 09:45  
**To:** [Redacted] Americas Directorate  
**Cc:** Gill Atkinson (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Nick Dean (Sensitive); SOSFA Action (Sensitive) [Foreign Secretary's Office]; PRD Action/info (Sensitive)  
**Subject:** PMQs 22 March 2017 [Redacted]  
**Importance:** High

[Redacted]

[...]

Many thanks,  
[Redacted]

## PMQS: 22 MARCH 2017

### FOREIGN SECTION

CONTENTS	
	[...]
7.	<b>YEMEN</b>
	• Key lines/issues 14
	[...]

[...]

Q. What is the UK's view on the increase in **US counter terror activity** in Yemen?

It is for the US to comment on their counter terror operations.

We work with regional and international partners to tackle the threat posed by terrorist organisations including AQAP and Daesh-Yemen. For operational reasons we cannot comment in detail on this activity.

[...]

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**From:** PRD Action/info (Sensitive) [Parliamentary Relations Department]

**Sent:** 23 March 2017 08:37

**To:** [Redacted]; Gill Atkinson (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Syria Briefing (Sensitive); [Redacted]; DL MENAD - Yemen Team (Sensitive); [Redacted]; DL Consular - Special Cases (Sensitive) [Consular]; [Redacted]; Philippa Makepeace (Sensitive)

**Cc:** SOSFA Action (Sensitive) [Foreign Secretary's Office]; PRD Action/info (Sensitive)

**Subject:** PMQs 29 March 2017 Deadline \*\* 6pm tonight \*\*

[...]

## PMQS: 29 MARCH 2017

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### YEMEN

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**Tobias Ellwood MP**  
**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State**  
**Foreign and Commonwealth Office**  
**Backbench Business Debate – Yemen**  
**12 January 2017**

'That this House notes the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen and the impact of the conflict on civilians; condemns any breach of international humanitarian law; and calls for an urgent independent investigation into reports of breaches of international humanitarian law on both sides of the conflict.' **Stephen Twigg MP, Chris White MP**

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Introduction

I thank the Hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby (Stephen Twigg) and my Hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) for initiating this debate. It is important that we continue to examine the impact on civilians of the conflict in Yemen, and consider what the UK and the international community are doing to protect them, to support them, and to bring about an end to this conflict. It is also important that we continue to discuss allegations of breaches of International Humanitarian Law, and the UK Government's response.



### Causes of the conflict

- In 2014 Houthi forces, and those loyal to former President Saleh, overran the capital Sana'a and forced out the legitimate Government of President Hadi. These forces have subsequently attacked Saudi Arabia, shelling border villages and killing Saudi civilians.
- In March 2015 a Saudi-led Coalition of ten countries commenced a military operation to restore the Hadi Government, to deter further Houthi aggression, and to defend the Saudi border.
- UN Security Council Resolution 2216 condemned the Houthis' actions.

### Why Yemen matters to UK

- The UK Government fully supports the Coalition's efforts to restore stability in Yemen and the right of Saudi Arabia to defend itself. Instability in Yemen threatens not just the Gulf but our own security in Western Europe. Al-Qaeda has a long-standing

presence in the country and there is a growing threat from Daesh.

[...]

## YEMEN

### The situation

1. [...]
2. [Redacted]
3. [...]

### Challenges and opportunities

4. [...]
7. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) [Redacted] retains a strong presence throughout Yemen. [Redacted] and is exploiting US/Coalition activity to win local support. [...]

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**From:** [Redacted] Middle East and North Africa Directorate

**Sent:** 29 March 2017 13:12

**To:** SOSFA Action (Sensitive) [Foreign Secretary's Office]

**Cc:** PS Minister Ellwood - Action (Sensitive); Christian Turner (Sensitive); [Redacted]; DL MENAD - Yemen Team (Sensitive); DL Gulf Team (Sensitive); Karen Pierce (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Neil Crompton \* (Sensitive); Martin Reynolds (PPS) (Sensitive); PUS Action (Sensitive); Neil Bush (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Tim Torlot (Sensitive); Matthew Rycroft (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Stephen Hickey (Sensitive); [Redacted]; Samantha Job (Sensitive); Philip Parham \* (Sensitive); [Redacted];

**Subject:** FS Update: Yemen OFFICIAL\_SENSITIVE

Private Secretary,

Please find below an update on Yemen.

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[Starts]

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previously alongside Yemeni government forces in Mokha. This is not confirmed but reinforces the fluid and complex nature of alliances in Yemen.

[Ends]

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**From:** [Redacted] Middle East and North Africa Department  
**Sent:** 10 January 2017 13:00  
**To:** PS Minister Burt - Action (Sensitive)  
**Cc:** DL MENAD - Yemen Team (Sensitive)  
**Subject:** Speech and Supps pack for Yemen Debate - Thursday 12 January OFFICIAL\_SENSITIVE

PS/Ellwood,

Please find attached the speech and Q&A Supps pack for the Yemen backbench debate on Thursday 12 January. We'll bring down two hard copies shortly.

We'll also review Hansard following Orals earlier today and make sure to include any additional lines needed.

Thanks  
[Redacted]

# YEMEN DEBATE

Thursday 12 January

*Q&A Supplementary*

[...]

**Terrorism in Yemen**

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[...]

**AQAP and Daesh-Yemen**

- Terrorist organisations such as AQ and Daesh prosper in ungoverned environments where they have the freedom to develop their

capabilities. This remains a particular concern in Yemen where AQAP are benefitting from the continued instability that results from Houthi aggression.

**Tobias Ellwood MP**  
**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State**  
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**Backbench Business Debate – Yemen**  
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'That this House notes the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen and the impact of the conflict on civilians; condemns any breach of international humanitarian law; and calls for an urgent independent investigation into reports of breaches of international humanitarian law on both sides of the conflict.' (Stephen Twigg MP, Chris White MP)

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