

Press release

New critical assessment of UK and coalition's campaign against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

LONDON, 25 May 2016 – While the US-led coalition has had some considerable successes in containing and rolling back Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, much more should have been achieved given the combined military might and other resources of the 66 members of the global coalition to counter Islamic State, which includes the United Kingdom. Those gains that have been made have come at the expense of civilian casualties, with an estimated 77 civilians killed by UK airstrikes. Furthermore, there are no signs that the terrorist threat to the United Kingdom from Islamic State is reducing despite nearly two years of UK airstrikes and other efforts to target the group.

These are the stark conclusions of a new assessment of the United Kingdom's Operation Shader and the wider coalition campaign against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Published today by Open Briefing, *The war with Islamic State* also expresses concerns over the extent of the covert ground operation by UK special forces and intelligence agents and the lack of parliamentary oversight of the operation.

Some of the report's other key findings include:

- Over the last 12 months, the US-led coalition and local partners have retaken up to 45% of Islamic State's territory in Iraq and 20% of its territory in Syria and the group has been driven out of the major cities of Tikrit and Ramadi in Iraq and Palmyra in Syria. However, Islamic State still holds at least 55% of its territory in Iraq and 80% of its territory in Syria despite 21 months of coalition airstrikes. It also still holds its strongholds of Mosul (Iraq) and Raqqa (Syria).
- The population controlled by Islamic State is now a third less than it was, but the group still exerts control over six million people in the territory it holds.
- Coalition airstrikes on Islamic State's oil facilities have resulted in oil production falling by a third, but the group still produces 21,000 barrels of oil a day, accounting for 43% of its income.
- Islamic State's revenues have dropped by 30% since mid-2015 and the group has had to reduce the salaries of its fighters by up to half; however, Islamic State's revenues are still at \$56 million a month.
- The flow of recruits to Islamic State has been reduced and half of Islamic State's fighting force and over 100 of their senior figures have been killed. Despite this, the group still has between 20,000 and 30,000 fighters left in theatre.
- It is likely that a minimum of 1,217 civilians have died in the 12,453 coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria to date. Based on estimates alone, it is possible that around 77 civilians were killed in UK airstrikes.



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Looking ahead, one of the authors of the report, Chris Abbott, the executive director of Open Briefing, said:

“It is clear that both the civil war in Syria and the political turmoil in Iraq must end if the coalition’s current strategy is to have a real chance of success in finally defeating Islamic State. Given that political resolution in the two countries is unlikely in the short term, it is instead likely that the coalition will steadily ramp up its military efforts through incremental increases by individual coalition members, including the United Kingdom, particularly of special forces and other ground troops.”

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Notes to editors

1. *The war with Islamic State: An assessment of the United Kingdom’s Operation Shader and the wider coalition campaign against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria* by Chris Abbott, Steve Hathorn and Matthew Clarke was published by Open Briefing on 25 May 2016. It is available to download from <http://www.openbriefing.org/regionaldesks/middleeast/the-war-with-islamic-state-an-assessment-of-the-united-kingdoms-operation-shader-and-the-wider-coalition-campaign-against-islamic-state-in-iraq-and-syria/>.
2. Open Briefing is the world’s first civil society intelligence agency. We are a unique international team of intelligence, military, law enforcement and government professionals working tirelessly behind the scenes to make a difference. We provide intelligence, security, training and equipment to organisations striving to make the world a better place. We scrutinise the actions of governments and militaries and generate alternative policies. And we deliver a public intelligence service so that *you* know what is really going on in the world. Founded in 2011, Open Briefing is a groundbreaking non-profit social enterprise supported by volunteers and funded by charitable grants and public donations.
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