



Ministry
of Defence

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THE RT HON MARK LANCASTER TD VR MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ARMED FORCES

MSU/4/3/2/ap

14th February 2019

Dear Julian,

Thank you for your letter of 28 January 2019, in which you sought details of the UK's support to the Peshmerga forces in the Kurdish Region of Iraq.

The UK is proud to have stood by the Iraqi and Kurdish people in the fight against Daesh. Iraqi Kurds have been close and dependable allies in this fight and have faced down a barbaric assault on their cultural identity and way of life. We recognise and pay tribute to the courage of the Peshmerga, who have suffered heavy losses but performed with great courage in the fight against Daesh. To this end, we are proud to have provided the Peshmerga with professional military support through the Coalition.

All the UK's cooperative activity with the Kurdish Regional Government and its forces is undertaken in line with the UK's "one Iraq" policy which aims to ensure equality of consideration for both Government entities in Iraq and recognises the Government of Iraq's intent that the country be recognised as a single entity, with an aspiration for long-term integration.

My officials have brigaded the UK's support to the Peshmerga into four key areas, as set out as follows:

Training of Peshmerga forces in in the Kurdish Region of Iraq

The UK has led the training programme with the Peshmerga. The UK has focussed on training Kurdish security forces in C-IED skills, infantry skills, medical skills and equipment support. To date we have trained over 12,800 members of the Peshmerga. We also provided training to Iraqi forces, including Kurdish security forces on the IED detectors we gifted to Iraq as a whole.

UK and Coalition airstrikes in support of Kurdish forces operating on the ground against Daesh targets

The Peshmerga played a key role in pushing Daesh back in northern Iraq. In most of their operations, they were supported by Coalition airstrikes. As part of the Coalition, the RAF has undertaken a broad range of airstrikes against Daesh targets in Northern Iraq, along

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the categories set out in our reporting to the Committee of Weapons Release Events. Although, as the Committee will know, we are unable to break out the numbers of our strikes that have taken place specifically in support of particular groups on the ground, we know that a significant number have supported Peshmerga operations.

The ongoing UK contribution to Peshmerga Reform

The UK funds two posts focussing on cooperation with the Kurdish Regional Government and the reform of the Peshmerga: a UK Defence Advisor in Erbil and the Special Defence Advisor to the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs. A comprehensive programme of work alongside the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs aims to deliver a sequenced plan for reaching the end state of a more affordable, capable and accountable regional force operating as an effective element of the Iraqi Security Forces. This includes unification, under central government control, of those Peshmerga forces currently aligned to political parties. The reform programme is building military capacity in the shorter-term, that can also support the counter-Daesh effort if necessary, and delivering institutional reform in the longer-term. This is a politicised and sensitive issue that requires a combined political-military approach, hence the UK's military advisers are operating from the Consulate General-Erbil. Successes to date include the establishment of a monthly committee, formed by the Minister, to drive forward reform, and a Reform Directorate. Very positive levels of dialogue on the design of the future Peshmerga and the optimum approach to unification are underway across Peshmerga forces, and the Minister aims to submit a recommendation on the Future Peshmerga Blueprint to the new KRG government.

This is bolstered by high-level engagement between UK Ministers and their counterparts in the Kurdish Region, as well as senior military contact from the likes of the Defence Special Advisor to the Middle East, General Sir John Lorimer, during which we promote the need for a whole-of-Government approach to reform. President Designate Nechirvan Barzani and PM Designate Masrour Barzani showed enthusiasm for Peshmerga Reform during Mr Burt's recent visit to Erbil.

Transforming the security sector in the Kurdish region is vital within the Kurdish Regional Government's wider reform agenda. It will bring benefits to the security, stability and prosperity of the KRI. The UK aims to ensure that Peshmerga reform is coordinated and coherent with the broader KRG security apparatus, as well as the Federal Iraqi security apparatus.

Gifting of warlike and non-warlike stores in support of Peshmerga operations, increasing their capabilities to fight Daesh

The UK has been supporting Iraqi, including Kurdish, security forces in their fight against Daesh since 2014. One aspect of UK Government support was to ensure that the Peshmerga had adequate supplies of military equipment.

At the request of the Iraqi Government, the UK provided lethal military aid to the Peshmerga in the form of Heavy Machine Guns (HMG), 12.7mm HMG ammunition and HMG spare parts and around £600,000 worth of military equipment. The UK also supplied non-lethal items such as halal rations, sleeping bags, body armour, helmets, first aid supplies, medical equipment and binoculars. The Kurdish Security Forces also received a share of the 1,000 IED detectors which the MOD gifted the Iraqi Security Forces.

In 2016, in answer to a further request from the Kurdish Regional Government, the UK gifted further ammunition to the Peshmerga. This enabled them to defend themselves, protect citizens and hold the front line against Daesh. The gifting package consisted of heavy machine gun ammunition for use with weapons previously gifted by the UK, and sniper rifle ammunition, consisting of 12.7mm and 7.62mm ammunition. The total cost was approximately £1.4 million plus the transport costs.

In addition, we have delivered 415 tonnes of supplies – including weapons and ammunition – provided by other countries.

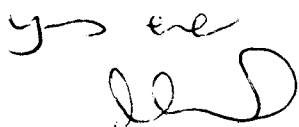
All of our gifting to the Peshmerga complied fully with the international co-ordination effort to ensure that the right equipment, with no wasteful duplication, is delivered by Coalition allies to Iraqi (including Kurdish) forces.

Gifts of equipment are always assessed against the Consolidated Criteria, which require us to consider the risk of equipment being used for internal repression, whether it could provoke or prolong internal or regional conflict, and whether equipment could end up in the hands of undesirable users. We do not permit an export if we judge that the risks exceed the threshold set out in the criteria.

The Minister of Peshmerga Affairs assured us that:

- weapons would be used to meet urgent operational requirements;
- weapons would remain in Iraq, and be used in fighting Daesh and for the defence of the civilian population;
- weapons would not be stockpiled for other purposes; and
- weapons would be used in accordance with international law – including International Humanitarian Law.

I trust this is helpful. The Consul General in Erbil, Martyn Warr, will see Jack Lopresti MP on 27 February 2019, and would be happy to brief him in greater detail.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Lancaster'.

THE RT HON MARK LANCASTER TD VR MP