

Turkey military action in Syria: Urgent Question opening statement

On 9 October, following the US announcement that it would withdraw its troops from the region, Turkey launched a military operation in north east Syria. Turkish troops have pushed into northern Syrian towns and villages, clashing with the Kurdish fighters over a stretch of now 125 miles. The UN estimates that at least 160,000 people have been displaced in less than a week.

From the outset, the UK Government has warned Turkey against taking this military action. And as we feared it has seriously undermined the stability and the security of the region. It risks worsening the humanitarian crisis and increasing the suffering of millions of refugees. And it also undermines the international effort that should be focused on defeating Daesh.

I can tell the house, Mr Speaker, on Thursday, 10 October, I spoke to Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu and expressed the UK's grave concerns. On Saturday, 12 October, the Prime Minister spoke to President Erdogan to reinforce those concerns and urge restraint. I also addressed the issue at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on Saturday. And yesterday, the EU released a statement which we joined, condemning Turkey's unilateral military action, and calling on it to withdraw its forces.

The UK Government takes its arms export control responsibilities very seriously and in this case of course we will keep our defence exports to Turkey under very careful and continual review. And I can tell the house that no further export licences to Turkey for items which might be used in military operations in Syria will be granted while we conduct that review.

And yesterday, the honourable members will know the US signed an executive order to impose limited sanctions on Turkey, including against senior members of Turkey's government. The EU considered this, and on balance, decided against sanctions at this stage. However, we will keep the position under careful review.

It is only right, Mr Speaker, as we condemn this military intervention, that we also recognise some of the legitimate concerns that Turkey has – in relation to the 3.6 million refugees that it has taken from Syria. And its concerns around the threat to its security from the PKK at its southern border with Syria.

For decades, Turkey has been a staunch ally in NATO – one of the largest contributors of military personnel. But with close partners, Mr Speaker, we must at times be candid and clear. This is not the action we expected from an ally. It is reckless, it is counterproductive, and it plays straight into the hands of Russia and indeed the Assad regime.

So the UK Government calls on Turkey to exercise maximum restraint and to bring an end to the unilateral military action. I commend this statement to

the house

[Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab – Urgent Question on Turkey & Syria](#)

[New chair for Government Property Agency appointed](#)

- Government Property Agency appoints Pat Ritchie, Chief Executive at Newcastle City Council, as its new Chair
- Ms Ritchie will be charged with realising GPA's ambitious target of delivering £1.4bn savings over the next decade
- Launched in 2018, the GPA manages a property portfolio valued at £195m

The government has today announced the appointment of Pat Ritchie for a four-year term as the new Chair of the Government Property Agency (GPA). The appointment has been made with the approval of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary.

The GPA acts as the government's landlord, providing strategic advice on its property estate. Launched in 2018 and managing property assets for over 60 departments and public sector bodies, it has been tasked with delivering savings worth £1.4bn to the public purse over the next 10 years.

Ms Ritchie will take up the position alongside her role as Chief Executive at Newcastle City Council where she has overseen successful regeneration projects in the north-east.

As chair of the GPA, she will drive efficiency and modernisation across a government estate spanning 210,000m² and valued at £195m, taking the reins from current Chair Liz Peace on 1 January 2020.

On her new role, Pat Ritchie said:

The GPA is having a real impact already by implementing greater commercial thinking to government property. Through revitalising and modernising the public estate we can help drive regeneration and economic growth.

I am looking forward to joining the GPA as Chair in the new year and would like to thank Liz Peace for her work in establishing the

agency. Building on Liz's legacy, I will bring my own background, experience and knowledge to help continue the GPA's mission and create a brilliant Civil Service.

Minister for Implementation Simon Hart said:

Pat's knowledge and expertise make her the ideal person to realise the GPA's ambitious agenda.

Through this work we can help spread growth around the UK and free up more money to spend on people's priorities, like schools, the NHS and the police.

A key pillar of Ms Ritchie's new brief will be the Government Hubs Programme. Hubs bring together different departments under one roof – moving civil servants to inner-city sites across the UK located near to transport links, amenities and shops, and will boost the economy through savings, inner-city regeneration and increasing trade for local businesses.

Mike Parsons, Director General of the Office of Government Property, said:

I am delighted to welcome Pat to the GPA Board. I am confident that her knowledge and experience will greatly benefit GPA in its important work in managing the property portfolio and ensure civil servants have fit for purpose accommodation that supports smarter working and promotes productivity.

GPA Chief Executive, Steven Boyd, said:

This is an exciting time for the GPA and a great moment for Pat to join us as we move into the second phase of our Hubs Programme and continue to grow our portfolio of government assets. Pat brings a wealth of knowledge and experience, and I am looking forward to working with her.

I would also like, on behalf of everyone at GPA, to thank Liz Peace for her contribution as Chair. Under Liz's leadership and guidance, GPA has set a clear strategy and direction of travel, and we look forward to seeing the momentum that we are beginning to build continue when Pat joins us in January.

About ODP

As a member of Operational Delivery Profession (ODP), you are often the public face of public service. If you don't have a role delivering direct to the public, you support those that do. In both cases, you make a real difference to people's lives and make government policies, strategies and plans a reality.

People are our thing. Whether you call them customers, claimants, citizens or colleagues. Whether you deal with them directly or indirectly and whether they are individual or business. We deliver for people. We understand them, help them and support them.

Find out more about your profession by watching our short film, [Proud To Be ODP](#)

About the ODP

You are part of the largest profession in government and our people make our profession. Together, we create and deliver exceptional services to citizens. We develop effective leaders who are inspiring, confident and empowering and who live our values. Our profession is inclusive, flexible, modern and connected, sitting at the heart of public service delivery.

Working in ODP you can do a huge range of jobs. Below are just a selection of the many hundreds of roles we have in ODP:

- Employer Adviser
- Consular Assistance caseworker
- Insolvency clerk
- Compliance Officer
- Data Analyst
- Jobcentre Manager
- Service Design Manager
- Communications Designer
- Passport Officer
- Call Centre Agent
- Customer Service Officer
- Debt Manager

Skills families

There are hundreds of different roles within the profession so to make it easier to identify your role and choose the most relevant learning resources available, we have broken the profession down into six skills families. A skills family is a term we use to group certain job roles together.

By doing this, we can then offer the right learning and development to the right person, so it's easier for you to find what you need.

Our skills families are:

- Help and Advice
- Case Ownership
- Safety and Enforcement
- Validation and Compliance
- Design and Support
- Leadership and Management

You may be able to identify your skills family really easily, or you might feel like your job role covers more than one family. There's no right or wrong answer, but we recommend you start by looking at the skills family you relate to the most, and work through the recommended resources from there.

[Workforce and volunteers at heart of #StationsDay celebrations](#)

- [#StationsDay](#) sees the Department for Transport and rail industry celebrating the work of young apprentices, volunteers and staff who keep the railways running
- online campaign recognises the vital role of stations in connecting communities, providing skilled jobs and boosting economic growth

The dedication, hard-work and enthusiasm of staff and volunteers responsible for keeping Britain's railways running are at the heart of Stations Day celebrations today (15 October 2019).

As the government invests a record [£48 billion to modernise the UK rail network](#), upgrading and building new stations across the country, Stations Day helps recognise the 240,000 people who, in stations of all sizes, are integral to keeping the country moving.

Last year alone, 1.8 billion passenger journeys were made in Great Britain, averaging 4.8 million passenger journeys each day. Station environments, passenger information and accessibility are being improved across the country, with major upgrades at the country's biggest stations.

Rail Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris, said:

Today we are celebrating the brilliant people at the heart of our railways, whose dedication and enthusiasm makes the journeys of millions of passengers every day that bit better.

More than 2,500 stations on our network have played a central role in our villages, towns and cities for over a century. Together with

industry, we are working to provide passengers with more modern and accessible stations, ensuring our railways continue to connect people across the country.

Some of the staff being celebrated today include young apprentices who have entered the industry as part of the Prince's Trust's 'Get into Railway' series. As part of a scheme delivered with South Western Railway, the series helps young people gain experience and skills in the rail industry.

Ashley is a gateline assistant at Havant Station:

I've been working for South Western Rail (SWR) for 4 months at Havant Station in Southampton. Ever since I was young, I've wanted a career in rail, so when I did the course with the Prince's Trust, it was a chance for me to get experience and to get my foot in the door. It was absolutely brilliant when I was offered the job at SWR. I love the trains, the stations and the customers.

I like working at Havant because it's a gateway to the south and it's a really busy station, especially in the morning peak. The passengers are great – especially the peak commuters – and the staff are so brilliant. Starting a career in rail can lead to so many good opportunities in the future and I would recommend it to anyone thinking about pursuing this as an option.

Shernell works at Clapham Junction Station:

I've been working at Clapham Junction Station for 6 months, following my placement with the Prince's Trust. The course was a chance for me to learn more about working in the railways and to hopefully get a job at the end of it, which I have been successful at.

The customers that you meet every day and the opportunities to progress your career are the things I love the most about working here. I'd like to be a train driver in the future, and that's my main goal now.

Director of Partnerships at The Prince's Trust, Ben Marson, said:

The Prince's Trust is proud to work within train operating companies like SWR. By working together, we are helping provide young people with life changing opportunities to gain work experience on the railways and secure jobs in the sector.

Volunteers, such as those at the Strawberry Line Café in Somerset, also play an important role in improving journeys for passengers. Situated on platform

1 at Yatton Railway Station, the café was set up in 2008 and quickly established itself as an integral part of the station. As a not-for-profit social enterprise, it was set up to employ and train adults with learning disabilities, enabling them to gain the skills to work in the catering and hospitality industry.

Jon Godden, train service delivery manager, said:

The café was born out of a local initiative to try to help people with learning difficulties find employment. At the time, I was the station manager for Yatton, so I knew there was a derelict room that needed refurbishment – it seemed like the perfect place to start the project, and so the café was opened, specifically to employ people with learning difficulties.

The best thing about the café is that it provides a real purpose for the community – both the staff it employs and the passengers it serves. It's a great use of station space and the passengers love it – especially the homemade carrot cake!

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