Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Click here to watch Sarah speak! Have the greatest respect for all colleagues in all parties who have spoken so eloquently against military action in Syria. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) spoke passionately about the risks of being drawn into a vicious civil war. That is why I voted against taking action in Syria two years ago. However, I believe that this has gone beyond a civil war and that ISIS is bringing the fight to us and would do so again on the streets of Britain as it has on the beaches of Tunisia and in Paris. This is an enemy with which there can be no dialogue. This is an enemy that has perpetrated enslavement, rape, child rape, torture and mass murder throughout the territories that it now controls. I believe that there is a compelling case for us not only to stand with our allies tonight, but to stand with the United Nations as it calls for us to take every action that we can against Daesh. I believe that there is also a case for standing with the civilians on the ground, given that our military action against Daesh in Iraq has so far helped to push it back, and to prevent the kind of atrocities that we have been witnessing across Syria and Iraq today.

Kirsty Blackman: Airstrikes, by their nature, are intended to inflict death, pain and suffering on people and families, some of whom will be innocent. Will someone please tell me how this action will stop new people becoming radicalised, how it will stop new terrorists, and how it will improve the human rights situation on the ground?

Dr Wollaston: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, because I think that it goes to the heart of the matter—and the heart of the matter, I would say to her, is that people are already suffering and being tortured throughout these territories. I would say to her that the action we have taken so far in Iraq—very careful, measured action—has, in fact, reduced the kind of civilian casualties to which she has referred. I am wrestling with this, just as she is, on behalf of my constituents, and I would say that the majority of my constituents who have contacted me agree with her. It is, therefore, with a very heavy heart that I am trying to make the case to them for my belief that action is now not only in our national interest, but in the interest of the civilians who risk being taken over by an evil that is beyond our imagining, here in the comfortable world that we inhabit in the UK.

I would say to the hon. Lady that these people have no hesitation whatsoever in perpetrating the most barbaric atrocities. I would point to the Yazidi women and girls—who have been kidnapped and are being held in conditions of enforced slavery, and, indeed, to child rape, which is allowed by Daesh. I would ask the hon. Lady whether she would like to spare civilians across Iraq and Syria that fate—the fate that awaits them. But I agree that these are very heavy considerations.
I would also say, as the proud daughter of an air force family, that our air forces are already putting their lives on the line in the skies above Iraq. I would like to call on the Leader of the Opposition but he is no longer in the Chamber to reflect on how much it will mean to the families who are following the debate today to know that they cannot count on his support. I think that although we all take, respectfully, different views about the risks, or indeed the consequences, of extending our action to Syria, it is essential for him to state unequivocally his support for our armed forces in the skies above Iraq.

For the benefit of any of us who are considering how to vote, let me focus for a moment on the consequences of inaction. Our first responsibility in the House is to protect the citizens of this country, and I believe that it is only a matter of time before mass casualty attacks such as those that we have witnessed on the streets of Paris and around the world are perpetrated in the UK. I think that we must all ask ourselves whether there is a greater sin in omission than in commission. I feel, very strongly, that there is now a compelling case for us to be able to look in the eye the families of those who may lose their lives in future, and to be able to say that we did absolutely everything we could to diminish the powers of this evil organisation.

This is the fascist war of our generation. We had to take action against fascism in Europe, and I think there is a compelling case for us to say that we have done everything we can today.

Hansard

The thresholds for approving the strikes are high and the skills sets are high, as yet the UK has not had a civilian casualty incident after months of bombing and he means in Iraq. We have heard much about the Syrian ground forces that can or cannot help to destroy ISIL. The strategy on the ground should not prevent the RAF’s involvement in air strikes. The ISIL strategy must be implemented first to suppress its ability to launch attacks on our streets. If the air strikes limit the opportunity of ISIL to attack us, we should take part in them. I believe it is important that we support our allies.

I do not know how I could face my constituents if we voted no tonight and, God forbid, there was a terrorist attack in the UK or on a beach in Tunisia and we had not done everything in our power to prevent it. What do we say to our allies who are taking military action when we are not with them after such an incident? Do we say, get on with it, but sorry, our involvement in military action in Syria stops on the Iraqi side of the border, even though we know the attack on the UK was organised from Syria? If we do not take part in this action, I believe we will be letting down our country and our allies, and will reduce our credibility in the international arena.

My prime motivation for supporting this motion today is the protection of our citizens. The wider strategy, both political and diplomatic, is important. It will not happen overnight, and neither will the involvement of ground forces. Our military involvement may be small, but our
aerial can use weaponry that the coalition does not have—weaponry that is precise, limits casualties and can suppress ISIL activities. It is not a complete answer in itself, but it is a start. It will buy us time to deploy a wider strategy. I feel uneasy about Britain not taking part in airstrikes when we know that it is a matter of self-defence. I will therefore support the motion tonight.

6.24 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I have the greatest respect for all colleagues in all parties who have spoken so eloquently against military action in Syria. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) spoke passionately about the risks of being drawn into a vicious civil war. That is why I voted against taking action in Syria two years ago. However, I believe that this has gone beyond a civil war and that ISIS is

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This is the fascist war of our generation. We had to take action against fascism in Europe, and I think there is a compelling case for us to say that we have done everything we can today.