

Parliament voted this week on proposals to extend British airstrikes to Syria and target the terrorist organisation ISIL.

In 2013 I voted against proposals for British military intervention in Syria as I was not persuaded that we should become involved in another country's civil war. However, the proposals brought before Parliament this week are fundamentally different and having thought long and hard about my vote, on this occasion believe that airstrikes are the right thing to do. I can assure you voting in favour of military action is one of the hardest decisions any MP will have to make in Parliament. No-one goes into politics to put people's lives in danger, whether they are our own troops or civilians abroad.

However, I believe we face a growing threat from ISIL who are committed to carrying out atrocities not only against Western civilians, as the recent attacks in Paris and the murder of 30 British civilians at a resort in Tunisia earlier this year show, but against anyone who does not share their beliefs regardless of their gender, religion, sexuality or nationality. I believe not to act to degrade their capabilities via targeted airstrikes in Syria, which we are already doing in Iraq, would make us less safe as a result.

There are of course a number of hard questions that rightly needed to be asked around the use of military force and the Prime Minister set out a clear strategy to Parliament involving no British boots on the ground, a clear exit and reconstruction strategy, a commitment to a political solution to stabilise Syria in the long-term and additional humanitarian support for civilians in Syria. Importantly, the Prime Minister confirmed that the legality of the proposals is covered by the unanimously adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2249.

This is a deeply complex and emotive issue and I could not hope to explain my views completely in the space kindly afforded to me in this column, which is why I have responded at length to local residents who have contacted me and posted my views on Facebook. While I know there are strong feelings on both sides of this argument, I voted with my conscience, having assessed the facts, and done my best to explain my reasons why.