

Withdrawal from the Middle East

The Middle Eastern wars under Presidents Bush and Obama have left the USA and NATO divided over their wisdom and efficacy. No one doubts the bravery and resolve of the troops and the successes of various military actions, but many agonise over the failure to build a winning political and diplomatic strategy around them to help create a more prosperous and more peaceful region. I have written recently about why Mr Trump now wishes to end US direct military intervention in Syria and may review activity in Afghanistan as well.

Recent events remind us that if Western actions and inactions do not help create a peace in the Middle East there is a substantial force for wider instability in the form of many refugees, displaced persons and would be economic migrants. It is not surprising that millions have fled Syria during the extreme violence of the conflict, nor that many have fled Libya or are leaving Yemen. It must be dreadful to try to lead a normal life, turn up for a regular job and sustain a family amidst the bombs, the terror, the warring factions and the armed bands. Many are forced out of their homes by violence, others leave their homes seeing no decent future for themselves in their own country.

The West has attempted to receive more migrants into its own economies, and has spent much money on camps and temporary accommodation for refugees nearer to their homes in the expectation that the wars will end and rebuilding will take place. The best answer is to help restore peace and progress in each of the countries, and facilitate the return of refugees and economic migrants to help restore those places. We need greater emphasis on western diplomacy and encouragement of better government, with support for those places and governments that can sustain economic development and gain some discipline and sensible control over their countries. The endless disruption of Middle Eastern regions and nations by dissident and warring factions causes much of the stress, but is not easily resolved if at all by western military intervention. The best the West can do is to assist and train domestic forces acting for regimes likely to offer some control and economic advance, even though these will not always be paragons of democratic virtue. Judging how many compromises to make in the interests of some peace and stability is never easy. What is clear is that the past actions have allowed substantial turbulence and mass movements of people which have made life much more difficult for them, and have proved disruptive more generally.

New Year's Honours

I would like to thank all those who have sent me kind messages on the award of a knighthood.

I am very conscious of the debt I owe all my constituents. It has been their advice, problems and issues that has provided much of the impetus to my thoughts, has influenced my contribution to the national conversation and allowed me to undertake public service. I have learned a lot from those who support me and from those who disagree with some of the views I express. It is a privilege to serve as Wokingham's MP.

I also would like to thank All Souls College Oxford where I am a fellow. They have provided me with a platform and with academic discussion and criticism to develop views on public policy and give lectures and seminars. This too has helped develop my thinking and to make a contribution to the national debate.

I have also enjoyed offering some help to Variety, the Children's charity, who do such good work for our community.

Helping migrants

It is not a good idea to help people smugglers put more people at risk by selling them expensive trips in unsuitable boats across the Channel. The UK authorities need to issue clear safety warnings to people not to undertake these journeys, and not to expose themselves to the criminal gangs who sell these places of danger. The UK of course does not wish to see people drown in the Channel and should co-operate and assist the French authorities to prevent these boats taking off from the French coast, or intercepting them early and returning the people safely to France where they have committed themselves to the water. The longer they are at sea the more danger there is of inclement sea and weather conditions overwhelming them or of collision with one of the many large vessels using the busy Channel waterway.

The UK has legal routes for refugees and for economic migrants from the EU which people should use where they wish to seek a work and residence permit. It is not a good idea to offer an expensive rescue service to people to jump the queue or get round the rules. There is the danger the rescuers will not encounter all the boats seeking night time passage across the Channel increasing the risk of death and disaster for any given boat, whilst their presence may encourage more to think this is a low risk way of expediting admission to the UK. Some of the criminals who run these illicit boats are seeking to make criminals of their passengers by encouraging some of them to arrive and work illegally in the UK, where they would then be prey to versions of modern slavery. The authorities need to be vigilant to clamp down on such vile practices. We want legal migrants to come through the proper routes and to then settle to a decent lifestyle here in the UK.

Government fund to help Town Centres

In the New Year the details of how Councils can apply for additional money to help modernise or improve town centres will be published. I have told Wokingham Borough of the opportunity to bid for funds, and will also contact West Berkshire to remind them.

12 big wins from leaving in March on WTO terms

- 1 Far from crashing out, we will be cashing in. We will get our money back to spend on our priorities. We will be better off.
- 2 We get control of our taxes allowing us to cut VAT along with other taxes. This will boost our growth rate and give all taxpayers a Brexit bonus.
3. We can hire more nurses, doctors, teachers, and police, and improve our social care with money saved from the EU
4. We can sign new trade agreements with the rest of the world to boost the majority of our trade currently with non EU countries.
5. We can remove tariffs on imported components to provide a boost to UK manufacturing.
6. We can restore and expand our fishing and fish processing industry.
7. We can have a farming and tariff policy that means we grow much more of food locally, cutting the food miles.
8. We can control migration and have a policy good for UK business and society.
9. We can make our own laws and refuse EU ones which are damaging.
10. We will end all the uncertainty for business
11. We can end the rows and the wild and usually pessimistic speculation about Brexit. We can turn to talking about other matters, and bring the nation together in discussing how to use the money and freedoms we have gained from exit.
12. We will become a self governing democracy again.

Leaving the EU is not a threat or a disease, but a huge opportunity.