

Fighting fewer wars is a good idea

I am a supporter of the UK having good defence forces to act as a deterrent to any foreign power that threatens our home islands or our overseas territories. I also wish us to have expeditionary capability to intervene overseas where our membership of the UN or NATO requires us to help in a common cause, or where our own territories are at risk.

I do not wish us to intervene in every Middle Eastern conflict, in the way Mr Blair and Mr Cameron wished to do. There is little evidence that some of our interventions had long term beneficial impacts, despite the brave and often successful short term military achievements. It needed political follow through, successful diplomacy and nation building, which often proved too difficult for a western country to help bring about.

Both the USA and the UK have been more circumspect about intervening in Syria. In the UK Parliament restrained the government, and in the USA the election of Mr Trump brought a more sceptical approach to Middle Eastern conflicts to office. The long and disastrous Syrian war has continued without Western ground troops. Had the West committed ground forces it is difficult to see it would have been any less devastating or bitter, with the added complications of tensions between Russia and NATO and possible adverse reactions from many Syrians against what would have been portrayed as a Western invasion force.

When we as a country put our troops in harms way it is most important they are given a feasible task and a cause to be proud of. In Syria there was neither on offer. All out war against ISIS would help Assad, an evil dictator. Trying to topple Assad would have helped ISIS, an evil terrorist group. UK policy was in danger of veering between two unpleasant sides, or sought the largely non existent third way force that could arise and beat both sides, whilst upholding western values .

Sometimes the West has to see there are limits to what force can achieve in places rent by civil war and religious and ethnic strife. In the end these conflicts need more talking and more politics. Assads victory will create a poisoned legacy and leave many displaced and unwelcome refugees, whilst prolonging the war would kill and render homeless yet more people.