

The question of Russia

According to Global Firepower Russia manages to sustain 3794 military aircraft, 20,216 tanks and 63 submarines on the same level of defence spending as the UK. The UK has according to the same source 856 planes, 249 tanks and 11 submarines. The UK economy is twice the size of the Russian one at current exchange rates. Russian wages are lower and a lot of military output comes from state factories which may well subsidise production costs.

These figures reveal why the West takes Russia seriously. It may lack state of the art technology in a lot of its military hardware, and may have problems getting it all operational, but no-one can deny that Russia has a serious military capability able to operate a long way from home if it needs to. It does also have some smart weapons. Russia has allies throughout the Middle East and is seeking to improve relations with China. NATO led by the USA has plenty of firepower of its own to protect its people and member states. The West has recently shown some resolve following the attempted murders in Salisbury. For her part Russia should understand and accept that NATO is a defensive alliance with no wish to extend territory by force of arms.

When intervening in conflict zones in the Middle East Russia and her allies proceed with less concern for collateral damage, less worry about killing non combatants in the anti ISIS war. Russia has taken over as the main outsider defeating Isis, with the West carefully keeping in touch to avoid mistakes in crowded skies over Syria. Russia also has substantial cyber capability, and uses the world media to pursue its policy aims.

Europe continues to welcome large quantities of Russian gas and to carry on trading, despite the obvious political disagreements. I would be interested to hear your thoughts on what NATO as a whole and the UK in particular should be saying and doing about Russian policy.