

## WORLD ORDER AND THE RESPONSE TO ISLAMIC TERRORISM

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The world order is under threat as the US pulls back from its role as 'global policeman' and other nations and factions begin to exploit military weaknesses that play to their advantage. Liberal democracies accustomed to the protection of the US military umbrella, are becoming anxious about their future security but are reluctant to increase arms spending. A weakened United Nations does not have the capability to prevent or end major crises like the Syrian conflict and relies on calls for peace that are often ignored. The issues were discussed in TAP 15.1 ('The future is here').

Then in TAP 15.2 ('Jez we did!'), we discussed the implications of having a committed anti-war activist as leader of the Labour Party. Would Jeremy Corbyn now be able to reach beyond the gesture politics of the peace movement and bring about a fundamental change in UK defence policy? The final paragraph of the article poses the choice.

*One option, as Corbyn proposes, is to accept that the UK is simply a small island on the north west coast of Europe and curb its [military] ambitions accordingly. Alternatively it could accept that it has a stake in a secure and thriving world order, and that leaving others to prop it up has not worked out well in the immediate past.*

Pacifists and anti-war activists generally will welcome the former option, but should acknowledge that it is not without risk in today's climate of threats.

Here we examine the choices faced by the UK, beginning with the December parliamentary debate on the use of air strikes against IS in Syria, which, although passed by a significant majority, points up some concerns.

### **Air strikes against IS targets in Syria**

Who would have thought that such a minor tactical decision would create so much public and media attention? Already involved in the UN-sanctioned coalition to contain and degrade IS, this was simply an extension of air strikes across the border of a failed state to attack a murderous terrorist group at its heartland.

Yet such was the Corbyn effect. Without this, the vote would surely have been passed with little fuss or formality. Corbyn's position was uncompromising and Labour MPs knew that their political futures could be in jeopardy if they did not toe the line, even though this was a free vote.

The 10-hour debate was polarized from the outset with 'war-mongers' and 'terrorist sympathizers' (as they were branded) stating in diametric opposition what the consequences of the air strikes would be. This was not a national assembly weighing the situation carefully but a battle of factions with different agendas. Few acknowledged that the conflict is so complex that it is practically impossible to judge whether the value of the strikes would outweigh the harm done. Would they kill more civilians than the regular killings by IS; would they strengthen or weaken the terrorist's ability to carry out attacks? And so on.

Further, there was no discussion about whether the air strikes might degrade IS resources and the safe space it would likely need to develop weapons of mass destruction. (I will return to this existential risk later.)

Nevertheless, the debate was a major event for the anti-war movement, especially as an indication of what a 'pacifist' commitment with political clout might achieve in more promising circumstances, such as might exist for a vote on unilateral nuclear disarmament.

But, doubt remains about where a blind belief in Corbynism will lead because it is a Hard-left ideology. Stop the War Coalition (its public front on defence issues), believes that all the ills in the world are due to US-led western imperialism and any future intervention, whatever the justification, will end with an Iraq-2003-type tragedy. By similar token, no criticism is levelled at the aggression by others, which can come across as support for the international policies of

countries like Russia, Iran and Syria, especially when their actions are said to be a response to western aggression; and also support for certain terrorist groups.

Leading figures of StWC make a big play of Noam Chomsky's argument that the crimes of my government are the crimes I can influence, so I should make them my main concern, and not the crimes of other governments. But is this an acceptable position in a closely interconnected world when non-western nations may be responsible for wars and major humanitarian disasters that affect us directly?

### **Absolute pacifism**

The position of absolute pacifists is not dependent on these issues and does not require bolstering by speculation about the outcomes of military intervention. Neither is there an obligation to buy into any ideological prejudice that gives the anti-war movement a bad name. The position taken by absolute pacifists come from the theological belief that all military force is wrong whatever the outcome of a conflict. It follows that some of the military interventions opposed will do more good than harm, and this has to be accepted (as far as it is understood).

But this does not mean that pacifists should not seek to understand what is happening in specific conflicts, using the knowledge of experts in the field and even the Just War as a framework for examining the pros and cons of particular conflicts.

For those who take the view there can be certain exceptions within the definition of 'pacifism', the situation is rather more problematic, although it is always possible - and indeed creditable in some circumstances) - to say that they are unable take a position in some circumstances. They would also be more likely to invoke the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in conflicts like Syria, which is now regarded as the 'disaster of our times'. Here the case rests on the need to protect innocents in the Middle East from the brutality of IS, other terrorist groups and, of course, the ruthlessness of the Assad regime.

### **The Church of England Synod vote on Syria**

On 24 November the General Synod did invoke R2P when it overwhelmingly backed military intervention in Syria to protect civilians. It called upon the Government 'to work with international partners in Europe and elsewhere to help establish safe and legal routes to places of safety, including this country, for refugees who are vulnerable and at severe risk'.

The Bishop of Durham, who proposed the motion, admitted during the debate that securing safe routes for Syrian refugees might well involve a 'need for armed conflict'. The Archbishop of Canterbury reiterated his words, saying that the motion committed the church to supporting the use of military force in these circumstances. The motion was passed by 333 votes with no member of the Synod opposed and three abstaining.

### **Consideration of the Just War**

Considering things further brings us to the use of the Just War, which requires that certain criteria are met before military force is used. Here it is appropriate to ask whether the struggle to defeat IS is actually a 'war' at all.

Professor AC Grayling writing in *Prospect* magazine (January 2016) argues that IS is not Islamic, or a state and this isn't war. He states:

*To call the action against Daesh 'war' is to dignify the organisation too far. It would like to carve out a state in which it could realise its vision of what is a genuinely Islamic dispensation should be like. ... But it is not a state, and its violence does not justify constitute a civil war because it is not a section of the population of either Iraq or Syria in conflict with its fellow citizens. On no definition of 'war' as properly defined is it engaged in war. It is engaged in crime. It is an international brigade of killers on the loose in other people's countries; a self-bred infection. 'There is no excuse left for not dealing with Daesh. It is a band of murderers, vandals and rapists.'*

*He points out that the current US leadership is reluctant to put 'boots' on the ground because of the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan, consequently they do not engage the new threat properly. But as the consensus of expert opinion suggests, the problem of Daesh requires a combination of actions: political and diplomatic activity, and the interdiction of Daesh's financial and logistical resources, yes; but also serious boots-on-the-ground work. This last should be seen as a police*

*action. It is not a war, but a matter of stopping violent criminals and rooting out their base of activity.*

Whether this invalidates the use of the Just War or not, senior figures in the Church of England have used it. The Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking in the Lords, said 'the Just War criteria have, to my mind, been met. But while they are necessary, they are not by themselves sufficient, and we could end up doing the right thing in such a wrong way that it becomes the wrong thing.

He then went on to point out that terrorism is a global issue and that by focusing on IS we are only providing local solutions. Further, military action is only one part of the answer. There must be a global theological and ideological component – not just one in this country – to what we are doing; and it must be relentlessly pursued and promoted. And it must include challenging Saudi Arabia and Qatar, whose own promotion of a particular brand of Islamic theology has provided a source from which IS has drawn a false legitimacy.

Several senior Anglican figures including the Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan have argued that the use of air strikes against IS in Syria is not acceptable under the Just War essentially because the outcome is uncertain. Lord Harries of Pentregarth (retired Bishop of Oxford), speaking in the House of Lords, concludes that the air strikes only meet three of the six Just War criteria, making the war unacceptable. Key points are as follows.

*The first three Just war criteria are easily met. Is there a just cause? Yes: Daesh is an evil that must be stopped. Is there competent authority? Yes: the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2249 calls on states to take 'all necessary' means to overcome this threat to international peace. Is there just intention? Yes: to establish an ordered peace in territory now held by ruthless killers.'*

*It is when we come to the last three of the six criteria that the issue becomes much more problematical. Have all other steps short of war been taken? No: there are clearly other actions that we should be tackling as a matter of urgency. One is working with Turkey to close the Turkey/Syria border to foreign fighters, who have in recent years made their way much too easily across it. The other is stopping the flow of arms to Daesh. Much stronger pressure must surely be put on those countries that are currently facilitating this.*

*The next two criteria are very closely intertwined and are crucial in the present debate in particular. Namely, more good than evil must flow from the military action, and there must be a reasonable chance of success. We need to think very seriously about what we mean by 'success' in this context. It has two aspects, both crucial. One is the worldwide battle for hearts and minds. We must never forget that the aim of these terrorists is to alienate young Muslim minds from the values of the countries in which they live and to win them over to their extreme form of religion.*

*IS must, and will, be defeated, but that would be worse than useless if military action resulted in thousands more disaffected Muslims joining its ranks worldwide. This could happen if bombing resulted in major civilian casualties.*

*The second aspect of success means winning and holding Daesh territory and establishing stable government upon it. For this ground forces are needed. But Syrian experts tell us that the Free Syrian Army, even if it numbered 70,000, is mainly in the south, with its fighters unwilling to fight outside their own provinces. As we know, they are very divided amongst themselves. Until there are ground forces in place ready to take territory—this probably means some prior political understanding with the Russians over the future of the Syrian Government, I do not think that the criterion of a reasonable chance of success has been met.*

*The Government is committed to a political and diplomatic process, which, of course, the whole House wholeheartedly supports. However, it is only the beginning of a process. It is premature to say that it is far enough advanced to have a reasonable chance of success on the ground, without which air strikes alone would be premature and could alienate the very people whom we want to hold to our side.*

This sets out the argument very well, but (perhaps just a quibble) is it really appropriate to use the Just War when we are considering a tactical decision in a war already being fought. Leaving aside a consideration of Grayling's point that this is not a war but a policing action, is it right to judge the ethics of the decision against the total engagement with IS? This is a discussion that should be had because this will be a recurring issue in the response to terrorism.

The view Lord Harries expresses is very much in line with the general conclusions set out in *Just War on terror? A Christian and Muslim response* (2010) initiated and produced by the Council on Christian Approaches to Defence and Disarmament (CCADD) while I was on the management committee. Lord Harries is CCADD president.

Edited by David Fisher and Brian Wicker, the book draws on Just War teaching as developed

within both the Christian and Muslim traditions. It examines whether, and how, liberal democracies can combat the new global terrorism both effectively and justly. The authors, including distinguished authors from both sides of the Atlantic, Christian and Muslim theologians, former senior civil servants and a General, deploy a wide range of experience and expertise.

Some key points are as follows.

*After 9/11 the phrase 'War on Terror' became a key element in the rhetoric of George Bush. But, as too few noticed at the time, this was immediately to misconceive and misstate the nature of the conflict that the world now faces. Only belatedly are politicians acknowledging that the conflict is first and foremost a struggle for the hearts and minds.*

*Military force, while it may be an essential weapon in the armoury to be deployed against terrorists, is only one weapon, to be wielded with care and only as a last resort. One of the main objections to the rhetoric of the president Bush's 'war on terror' was that it appeared, by contrast, to prejudge the appropriate response to terrorism always in favour of military action.*

*A common thread through all the lessons learnt about military intervention has been a rediscovery of the importance of morality amidst the pressures and passions of conflict. This point was emphasised by Sarah Sewall in her introduction to the new US Counterinsurgency Field Manual (2007). The fundamental lesson that has had to be learnt is that, when confronted with a terrorist threat – however menacing it may appear – it remains vital that any community and, in particular, a liberal democracy, in seeking to defend its own values, should not lose them.*

This leads us to consider how US international policy has changed since the Iraq debacle and how this affects our view of America's role in the world. The track record of President Obama's term in office is the significant here.

However much we agonise over the UK's role in Syria or the world generally or take the Corbynist view that we should distance ourselves from US foreign policy and withdraw from all military involvement, we still have to recognise the benefits that the US provides, including support for the defence of Europe as the key player in NATO.

### **President Obama, a failed Nobel Peace Laureate?**

Few can doubt that Barack Obama has significantly changed the tone of US foreign policy. Bush's rhetoric of a 'War on terror' has been tempered.

It has to be said that the new administration has not repudiated the doctrine of pre-emptive military force. But its overall approach to countering terrorism, as to international relations generally, is more multilateralist and gives higher priority to diplomacy and non-military options than its predecessor. Obama reaffirmed the commitment of his administration to multilateralism in his address to the UN General Assembly in September 2009.

In his State of the Union address this month, he posed a question that suffuses his international policy: 'How do we keep America safe and lead the world without becoming its policeman?' In essence, it is a variation on President Clinton's theme of preparing for a rule-based world in which the US is not the top dog. Obama's supporters would say that his achievement is actually to have initiated that turnaround for the global good.

It is not only that he has (largely) extracted the US from the unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nor that he has ended the destructive isolation of Cuba and facilitated the collective efforts to bring Iran in from the cold and halt in its nuclear weapons ambitions – these are significant feats. At a moral level there have also been improvements in, for example, the banning of coercive interrogation techniques employed in Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere. These moves are part of a rethink of the way the US – still as he rightly emphasised, by far the most powerful nation economically and militarily – interacts with the outside world.

But conservative critics do see this as weakness and failure. They claim Obama has presided over a sharp decline in American power and influence around the world. They point particularly to his inability to halt the war in Syria and defeat IS. There is, of course, some truth in this, but all pioneering change has risk and only time will determine the judgement.

Obama is certainly both temperamentally and intellectually a reluctant interventionist, which should be appealing to the anti-war movement. Further, whoever follows him into the White

House is likely to find this logic more, not less, compelling, the more interconnected the world becomes and memories of the Cold War and Bush's 'War on terror' fade.

Whatever the strength of this logic, it is time that the Hard-left anti-war activists recognised that a change has taken place and stop harping back to the 2003 invasion of Iraq; and that it is important for the UK to have a positive relationship with the US and contribute to any initiatives judged to be valuable.

But it is in the arena of nuclear weapons that Obama's international policy is likely to be judged, not least because he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2009, nine months into his presidency with no tangible achievements to his name. This was very controversial and Geir Lundestad, secretary to the Nobel committee, wrote in *Secretary of Peace* (his recent memoir) 'the prize was given in the hope of bolstering support for Obama's vision to rid the world of nuclear weapons.' and 'In that sense the committee did not achieve what it had hoped for.'

[Include paragraph on the importance of the nuclear deal with Iran.]

These issues are crucial as international nuclear security is deteriorating. Twenty years after the Cold War, neither the US or Russia has ruled out the first use of nuclear arsenal and both maintain a combined strength of 1,800 nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert. Communication between NATO and Russian chains of command is also at a new low, far worse than in the 1970s. Nuclear weapons are also bound to be vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Nuclear experts say that the growth of cyber-warfare is the biggest potential threat to the reliability of automated command and control systems (see William J. Perry's book, *My journey at the nuclear brink*).

Clearly there is an increasing risk that IS or other terrorist groups may eventually have access to nuclear weapons or be able to use cyber attacks to override security procedures for the nuclear weapons held by other countries. IS is determined in its aims and practices which it sees as a catalyst to a coming Armageddon, which makes it very dangerous.

Warnings from senior British military sources that the group is trying to obtain nuclear explosives, and the reports of the capture of Russian smugglers who have offered to provide them with nuclear materials, suggest an inevitable outcome. The longer IS exists the closer we approach the possibility of IS exploding a 'dirty bomb' in a major capital. The situation is urgent and, given that their aims are completely incompatible with the possibility of negotiation, it is nonsense to believe that military action should wait until all other avenues have been explored.

### **Some points of conclusion**

Leaving aside the absolute pacifist position, it is generally recognised that there will be a need to use military force when responding to extreme terrorist threats at least to protect civilians from attacks or when creating safe havens or corridors to move civilians from conflict areas.

But the extent to which pre-emptive attacks – and airstrikes in particular – are employed is more questionable. This is because the political and moral environment within which terrorists operate is extremely complex and it is folly to expect answers to be simple and easily implemented.

It is important that debate is as informed as possible and does not degenerate into a battle of polarised positions where political ideology alone determines beliefs and actions.

Furthermore, it should be understood that any response to terrorism should be holistic and recognize that this is ultimately a battle for hearts and minds. The Just War can provide a framework to debate these issues although its limitations should be understood and additional consideration given to how the peace (after conflict) will be won.

There are indications that the US, without which there is unlikely to be a coordinated international response to terrorism, is taking a more considered view to action with an emphasis on multilateral approaches. If this becomes established, the anti-imperial rhetoric of the Hard-left will be unhelpful and could be damaging to international cooperation.

Finally, it is wrong to think that there is no urgency in dealing with IS. Negotiation is almost certainly a false hope and a protracted 'long' war increases the risk that the organisation will use or facilitate the use of nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction.

Tony Kempster (January 2016)