

MPs weigh up case for war in a complex world

FOLLOWING THE aerial attacks by a US-led coalition upon bases held by the "Islamic State" (IS or ISIL) in Syria and the Khorasan cell, a little-known al-Qaida offshoot, David Cameron declared that the war against IS is "a fight you cannot opt out of".



Edward Spiers
Edward M Spiers is a professor of strategic studies at the University of Leeds.

Speaking after the beheading of David Haines and the US journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff, the Prime Minister informed the US TV channel NBC that IS was planning terror attacks upon Britain, Europe and the United States. "These people want to kill us. They've got us in their sights," he insisted.

He has duly requested the recall of Parliament to debate the issue, and clearly hopes to avoid a repetition of the humiliating defeat of August 29, 2013 over a motion that might have led to British participation in the bombing of President Bashar Assad's forces.

MPs will doubtless share the popular outrage over the atrocities committed by IS, its sickening (if highly effective from its point of view) use of social media and its widespread attacks upon "non-believers", including some 130,000 Kurds recently driven over the Turkish border.

They may agree that Britain has to take an active part in the new "coalition of the willing", forged by the Obama administration. In so doing, some may raise questions over the political, legal, strategic and diplomatic issues involved.

Politically, while there may be more popular support for British engagement in 2014 than there was last year, opinion polls indicate that the scars over the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have not healed, and that popular support for a new bombing campaign is more lukewarm than it is in the United States.

So strong is US support for Obama's pledge to "destroy and degrade" IS through bombing, without placing American boots on the ground, that the president launched the attacks upon Syria on Monday without any authorisation from the US Congress or from the UN Security Council.

As he merely informed Assad's regime that he was about to bomb Syria, as distinct from seeking its permission as he did in Iraq, the legality of bombing Syria was far from clear. There was no justification in self defence as IS had not attacked the United States, and the US could only claim "anticipatory self defence" in respect of the intelligence claims about an imminent attack from the Khorasan cell.

Our MPs may console themselves that they are only voting to start bombing in Iraq where Haider al-Arabi, the Iraqi prime minister, has invited Britain to do so.

They may also consider IS as a peculiarly barbaric and destabilising movement, and that the legitimacy of confronting it has been confirmed by the willingness of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar to join the US in bombing IS targets.

However legitimate the intervention, it may still be worth considering whether Obama's strategy is likely to achieve its aims.

Since July, the US has delivered 194 aerial strikes upon IS in Iraq, thwarting its drive into the Kurdish areas in the north, assisting in the recapture of the Mosul dam, and resisting an advance on the Haditha dam.

Yet the ground operations of the Iraqi army have achieved relatively little, failing in assaults upon Tikrit and Fallujah, and, on Monday, the Iraqi government conceded that IS militants had overrun a camp in Anbar province, where 800 Iraqi soldiers had been trapped, reportedly killing 300 of them.

At least the US has advisers in Iraq to assist its army; it has none in Syria, where the supposedly "moderate" Free Syrian Army has been riddled with corruption, incompetence and dissent.

The Kurdish Front might have been worth backing in northern Syria but its links with the PKK, the Kurdish terror group

Our MPs may decide that Britain cannot rely on other countries to defend our interests.

in Turkey, mean that neither Washington nor Ankara can support it.

Obama's currently plans to train 5,000 "moderate" Syrian rebels in Saudi Arabia and Jordan over the next year but how they could operate against Assad's army and the 30,000 IS zealots baffles two former US Secretaries of Defence, Bob Gates and Leon Panetta.

They agree with General Mark Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that the US may have to consider inserting ground forces in the future.

So far President Obama has adamantly opposed this option but the only alternative might be to press either Turkey or Iran to intervene in Syria and/or Iraq, options that could have major international consequences.

Despite all these uncertainties, and the prospect of another long war in the Middle East, our MPs may decide that Britain, having identified a direct threat from IS, cannot rely on other countries to defend our interests.

Another rejection of the case for war, in other words, would be diplomatically disastrous.



STRIKE FORCE: A formation of US Navy F-18E Super Hornets over northern Iraq as part of US-led airstrikes on the ISIL group and other targets in Syria. PICTURE: AP/US AIR FORCE

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The 'Islamic State' has murderous plans to expand well beyond Iraq and Syria, and to carry out terrorist atrocities right across the world. It is recruiting new fighters from all over the world.

We must learn from past to confront 'Islamic State'

THE WORLD faces a mortal threat from the rise of ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) in Syria and Iraq.

Deir al-Zor is a province in Eastern Syria. Home to the al-Sheitaat tribe, it was captured by ISIL last month. Seven hundred tribesmen were executed, many were beheaded. The vast majority were civilians – Muslims – who refused to take an oath of allegiance to ISIL's sick extremist world view – and who paid for this with their lives. They are not alone.

Across Syria and Northern Iraq, thousands have suffered the same fate. Muslims – both Sunni and Shia. Christians, Yazidis, people of every faith and none. ISIL is not a problem restricted to just one region.

It has murderous plans to expand its borders well beyond Iraq and Syria, and to carry out terrorist atrocities right across the world.

It is recruiting new fighters from all over the world. Five hundred have gone there from Britain, and one of them almost certainly brutally murdered two American journalists and a British aid worker, Yorkshire-born David Haines.

This is a problem that affects us all. And we must tackle it together. Now there is not one person who will view this challenge without reference to the past. Of course it is absolutely right that we should learn the lessons of the past, especially of what happened in Iraq a decade ago.



David Cameron

David Cameron is the Prime Minister. This is an edited version of his speech to the United Nations ahead of today's debate in Parliament.

But we have to learn the right lessons. Yes to careful preparation; no to rushing to join a conflict without a clear plan. But we must not be so frozen with fear that we don't do anything at all.

Isolation and withdrawing from a problem like ISIL will only make matters worse. We must not allow past mistakes to become an excuse for inaction.

The right lesson is that we should act – but act differently. We should be:

- comprehensive – defeating the ideology of extremism that is the root cause of this terrorism – so that we win the battle of ideas, not just the battle of military might.

- intelligent – supporting representative and accountable governments and working with them at their requests, not going in over their heads.

- inclusive – working with partners in

the region who are prepared to be part of the solution, potentially including Iran.

- uncompromising – using all the means at our disposal, including military force, to hunt down these extremists.

The root cause of this terrorist threat is a poisonous ideology of Islamist extremism. This is nothing to do with Islam, which is a peaceful religion which inspires countless acts of generosity every day. Islamist extremism on the other hand believes in using the most brutal forms of terrorism to force people to accept a warped world view and to live in a quasi-medieval state.

To defeat ISIL – and organisations like it – we must defeat this ideology in all its forms. As evidence emerges about the backgrounds of those convicted of terrorist offences, it is clear that many of them were initially influenced by preachers who claim not to encourage violence, but whose world view can be used as a justification for it. We know this world view. The peddling of lies: that 9/11 was a Jewish plot or that the 7/7 London attacks were staged. The idea that Muslims are persecuted all over the world as a deliberate act of Western policy. The concept of an inevitable clash of civilisations.

We must be clear: to defeat the ideology of extremism we need to deal with all forms of extremism – not just violent extremism.

For governments, there are some

obvious ways we can do this. We must ban preachers of hate from coming to our countries. We must proscribe organisations that incite terrorism. And we must stop the so called non-violent extremists from inciting hatred and intolerance in our schools, our universities and yes, even our prisons.

Of course there are some who will argue that this is not compatible with free speech and intellectual inquiry. But I say: would we sit back and allow right-wing extremists, Nazis or Ku Klux Klansmen to recruit on our university campuses? No.

We need Muslims and their governments around the world to reclaim their religion from these sick terrorists as so many are doing and quite rightly doing today. We now have a substantial international coalition in place, including Arab nations, committed to confronting and defeating ISIL. We have a comprehensive strategy to do that – with the political, diplomatic, humanitarian and military components that it needs to succeed over time.

The UN Security Council has now received a clear request from the Iraqi government to support it in its military action against ISIL. So we have a clear basis in international law for action.

My message is simple. We are facing an evil against which the whole of the world should unite. And, as ever in the cause of freedom, democracy and justice, Britain will play its part.

Incoherent policies fed rise of fanatics

MPS MEET in Westminster today to discuss the involvement of the UK's armed forces in strikes against Islamist rebels fighting Bashar-al-Assad's regime in Syria.

How quickly the modern world changes! Just over a year ago those same MPs were voting on pretty much the opposite – at that time the proposed military action was against Assad and favour of the rebels.

So let's get this straight – in August 2013 our Government wanted to bomb Assad in order to help the Islamist rebels, and today it wants to bomb the rebels, which will undoubtedly help Assad.

Confused? Don't worry, we all are. The sheer incoherence of Western foreign policy is a wonder to behold.

Since the onset of the so-called "Arab Spring" four years ago, Western politicians have blundered from one catastrophe to the next with the result that the world is now a far more dangerous place than it was back in 2010.

At the time naive fools such as Nick Clegg were wetting their knickers over the "Arab Spring", breathlessly hyping it up as a "Berlin Wall moment" which heralded the onset of democracy and peace throughout the Middle East.

Well, how is that one turning out Nick?



Bill Carmichael

EVERY FRIDAY

Sure it is good to see the back of blood-soaked tyrants such as Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, and few would shed many tears if Assad was to go the same way.

But they are being replaced by regimes that are equally nasty and brutish and which are no friends of democracy.

Last year, when our government was attempting to drum up support for the Syrian rebels who were being pounded by Assad's superior firepower, some of us pointed out that many of the rebel side were in fact fanatical Islamists who supported al-Qaida.

Oh no, we were told, Western aid and weapons would only go to those "moderate Islamists" who could be relied

on to bring down Assad without then turning their guns on the West.

I am not sure what the definition of a "moderate Islamist" is; perhaps it is a nice, cuddly Jihadist who is kind enough to warm the knife before he saws your head off?

But either way this entire policy very quickly went pear-shaped. The "moderate Islamists" turned out not to be very moderate at all and are in fact a bunch of gibbering lunatics who are raping and killing all in their path. And to make matters worse they now have their hands on all the weaponry and aid supplied by the West over recent years.

How utterly bloody marvellous.

Given the scale of the current threat, we now have little choice other than to agree to strikes against the Islamists in Syria. But let us be realistic about what we can achieve. Even if we succeed in degrading the capabilities of the Islamic State, the jihadist threat to the UK will remain for the foreseeable future because of past policies – such as Labour's open doors immigration blunder.

Credibility deficit

ED MILIBAND admitted this week that he had written a section on reducing the

deficit in his speech to the Labour Party conference, but when it came to delivering the speech he simply forgot it.

What? The Government is overspending to the tune of around £100bn a year – or £2bn a week – which is being added to £1.3 trillion debt mountain (about £22,000 for every man, woman and child in the country) that will eventually have to be paid back by our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

And this existential crisis that threatens the future of our country simply slipped the Leader of the Opposition's mind? Astonishing!

Unless Labour has a strategy for dealing with the deficit, it will have no money to spend on the NHS, or anything else for that matter.

If Miliband goes on the sort of borrowing and spending spree that brought to the country to its knees the last time Labour was in power, he will be lucky to last 10 weeks as Prime Minister before the wheels come off, let alone the 10 years he seems to banking on.

And the fact he managed to entirely "forget" about the deficit tells you all you need to know about the credibility of Labour's economic policies.

An Evening of Clairvoyance

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Dates for 2014

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13th November	at the Harrogate Cairn Hotel and
27th November	at The Kings croft Hotel, Pontefract.
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