Syria

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative) Click here to watch Sarah speak

Parliament has done its job today: it has applied the brakes to a headlong rush into unilateral western military action.

The problem with the motion, which is undeniably full of a series of truths, is that it draws one into agreement. However, there is a sting in the tail, which is that it asks us to agree that unilateral western military action is legally justified. I do not agree with that statement. For that reason, I am sorry that I will not support the Government motion tonight.

The country is almost unanimously opposed to unilateral western military intervention. That is not because we are a nation of appeasers and apologists; it is because the nation rightly has weighed up the risks of such action exploding into a wider military conflict with hundreds of thousands more deaths.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby, Conservative)

Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons why many of our constituents are so opposed to this debate taking place is that they believe we are about to vote on military action? Of course, that is not the case, as the Prime Minister made clear today.

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

The point is that agreeing to the legality of military action inevitably sucks us closer to the cliff's edge. That is why I will oppose the motion.

Richard Bacon (South Norfolk, Conservative)

Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

I will not at this stage.

The Arab League has supported the principle of UN-backed intervention, but it has stated today that it does not back unilateral western military intervention. That is right. It undermines the Arab League when the west constantly steps in and makes decisions instead of allowing it to develop a regional solution that could lead to lasting peace.

We cannot destroy Assad's arsenal of weapons. That has been made clear. The best that we can do is to deliver a warning. Are we seriously suggesting that no nation in the Arab League is capable of delivering that warning? Is Saudi Arabia not capable of that? If not, what on earth are we doing arming all these nations to the teeth? It is time for the Arab League to step up to the plate and for western countries to recognise that we cannot continue to impose solutions, because those solutions fuel resentment and harden attitudes; they raise the question about the double standards of the west across the middle
east.

Where was the world's policeman in 1985 when Iran was under sustained attack from chemical weapons? It suited the west to support Iraq in that situation. Why did we allow the world's policeman to weaponise white phosphorus? When white phosphorus contacts the skin and burns as it oxidises, it burns right down to the bone. If that is not a chemical weapon, what is? Why is the world's policeman allowing the USA to sell cluster bombs to Saudi Arabia? The point about cluster bombs is that they continue to kill and maim children long after the combatants have left the field. We need to be very clear. Why is the world's policeman not calling a coup a coup in Egypt? These are the kinds of issues that cause burning resentment across the middle east, with good reason. It is time that we let the Arab League come to a regional solution, if we are going to achieve lasting peace.

To be wary of war is not to stand idly by, but a realistic appraisal of the risks and learning from past experience. The British people are not standing idly by; they are delivering humanitarian aid, but they do not feel that humanitarian aid from the west is best delivered in the form of a cruise missile.

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