

# The Cost of Doing Nothing



The price of inaction in the face of mass atrocities

Based on work begun by Jo Cox MP (1974-2016) and Tom Tugendhat MP  
Completed by Alison McGovern MP and Tom Tugendhat MP





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# Preface

## Dean Godson, Director, Policy Exchange

The *Britain in the World* project at Policy Exchange was launched at the end of March 2016 to bring some fresh ideas into the foreign policy debate in the UK. Our first major piece of work was to be a report on the role of humanitarian intervention, co-authored by Jo Cox, the late Labour MP for Batley and Spen, and Tom Tugendhat, Conservative MP for Tonbridge and Malling.

While they had different perspectives on a number of issues, Jo and Tom shared a concern that Britain was becoming more introspective and less engaged in the world. The intention of the report was to combine Jo's experience of working in the humanitarian sphere with Tom's experience of military operations, and offer some fresh thinking on how to prevent mass atrocities and when or whether the use of military force is warranted. From Policy Exchange's perspective, the report supported the core goal of our *Britain in the World* project, namely to interrogate a greater sense of what constituted the British 'national interest'.

Both Jo and Tom thought British involvement in the 2003 invasion of Iraq was an error, though for different reasons. Tom served there in the army, working closely alongside the Royal Marines. Each felt that it was crucial to learn the lessons of Iraq for the future. But they also felt that this experience should not lead Britain to retreat into knee-jerk isolationism, unthinking pacifism and anti-interventionism. They saw the conflict in Syria as a forbidding example of what can happen in a world without concerted international engagement, when major crises and conflicts arise.

Jo and Tom's report was due out on 6 July 2016, at the same time as the delayed Chilcot Inquiry into the Iraq War. On 16 June, Jo Cox was murdered in her constituency. What follows is an attempt to carry on her legacy of proactive humanitarianism and cross-party advocacy. Alison McGovern MP – a friend and former colleague of Jo's – has taken on the role of co-author alongside Tom Tugendhat. The head of Policy Exchange's *Britain in the World* project, Professor John Bew, has provided a background paper with the historical context on intervention, showing its surprising frequency in UK foreign policy, and friends and family have provided advice and guidance, with a view to prompting the debate and discussion Jo was so very keen to see.



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## About Jo Cox

Jo Cox was a life-long humanitarian. She dedicated her career to helping those less fortunate than herself, whether in Batley and Spen or around the world.

Before becoming an MP, Jo worked for Oxfam International, the NSPCC, the White Ribbon Alliance, the Freedom Fund, and Save the Children. With her work she travelled to many of the world's war zones from Kashmir to Gaza, Afghanistan to Congo and Darfur. In her holidays, she and her husband worked in Bosnia and Croatia with children who had lost their parents.

Her experience of conflict, of talking to children who survived the Srebrenica massacre and to women who had been raped in Darfur, gave her a burning desire to do whatever she could to protect civilians from war.

As an MP for just over a year, Jo had already made her mark. In her first 12 months in Westminster, Jo campaigned on issues both foreign and domestic, from combatting loneliness amongst the elderly, to being a vocal advocate for the need to protect people caught up in the Syria crisis.

Although a staunchly proud member of the Labour Party, Jo was ready to work with anyone with whom she shared a cause, and to speak out against her own party when she thought it was getting something wrong.



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## In Jo's own words

Every decade or so, the world is tested by a crisis so grave that it breaks the mould: one so horrific and inhumane that the response of politicians to it becomes emblematic of their generation — their moral leadership or cowardice, their resolution or incompetence. It is how history judges us. We have been tested by the Second World War, the genocide in Rwanda and the slaughter in Bosnia, and I believe that Syria is our generation's test. Will we step up to play our part in stopping the abject horror of the Syrian civil war and the spread of the modern-day fascism of ISIS, or will we step to one side, say that it is too complicated, and leave Iran, Russia, Assad and ISIS to turn the country into a graveyard? Whatever we decide will stay with us forever, and I ask that each of us take that responsibility personally.

To date, neither side of the House has a record to be proud of. Let me start with my party. One of the reasons it is such an honour to be standing on this side of the House is the deep, deep pride that I have in Labour's internationalist past. It is pride in the thousands of people from our movement who volunteered to fight tyranny alongside their fellow socialists and trade unionists in the Spanish civil war; pride in the leaders of our party—and Robin Cook in particular—who demanded action to stop the slaughter of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica and elsewhere, in the face of outrageous intransigence from the then Conservative Government; and pride in the action we led in government to save countless lives in Kosovo and Sierra Leone. In recent years, however, that internationalism has first been distorted, and now risks being jettisoned altogether.

My heart sank as I watched in 2013 when, following President Assad's use of chemical weapons against civilians, we first voted against a military response and then supported taking military options off the table. Responsibility for the mishandling of that critical vote, which had such far-reaching international implications, falls principally on the Government, but we on these Benches carry some culpability for letting Assad ride roughshod and unchallenged across what should have been a sacrosanct red line. As a result, the international community lost all credibility in our subsequent efforts to stem the spread of, and the suffering in, this horrific civil war. Indeed, our failure to intervene to protect civilians left Assad at liberty to escalate both the scale and the ferocity of his attacks on innocent Syrians in a desperate attempt to cling to power.

I understand, of course, where our reticence comes from. It comes from perhaps the darkest chapter in Labour's history, when we led this country to war in Iraq. Many Members in all parts of the House have been scarred by that experience, and understandably so; but let us all be clear about the fact that Syria is not Iraq. I opposed the war in Iraq from the beginning because I believed that the risk to civilian lives was too high, and their protection was never the central objective. I knew, as we all knew, that President George Bush was motivated not by the need to protect civilians, but by supposed weapons of mass destruction and a misguided view of the United States' strategic interest.

I marched against that war, and have marched against many others in my time. Indeed, before I joined the House I was an aid worker for a decade with Oxfam. I have seen at first hand the horror of war and its brutal impact on civilian populations. I have



met 10-year-old former child soldiers with memories that no child should have to live with. I have sat down with Afghan elders with battle-weary eyes. I have held the hands of Darfuri women, gang-raped because no one was there to protect them. From that experience, alongside a horror of conflict, I have the knowledge that there are times when the only way to protect civilians requires military force. I might wish that it were not so, but it is. That is why I firmly believe that the Labour Government were right to champion the adoption, in 2005, of a landmark global commitment to the best and most fundamental of our human ideals: the responsibility to protect civilians. I still firmly believe that a legitimate case can be made for intervention on humanitarian grounds when a Government is manifestly unwilling or unable to protect its own civilians. Sovereignty must not constitute a licence to kill with impunity.

The history of Iraq hangs over us all, and it should, but its legacy is awful enough without supplementing it with a new one of ignoring the slaughter in Syria. We must not let it cloud our judgment or allow us to lose sight of our moral compass. The war in Iraq led to the deaths of thousands upon thousands of civilians. Its legacy must be to make us all put the protection of civilians at the centre of our foreign policy, not to make us sit on the sidelines while hundreds of thousands more are killed and millions flee for their lives. – Hansard, 12 October 2015

As someone who spent over a decade campaigning for the world to adopt the Responsibility to Protect doctrine at the UN – we must now ensure that Governments the world over deliver on their promises on preventing genocide and other crimes against humanity. Never again can we let innocents suffer as they did in the Holocaust. Never again. – Jo's signature and message in the Holocaust Educational Trust's Book of Commitment

As someone who spent over a decade campaigning for the world to adopt the Responsibility to Protect doctrine at the UN – we must now ensure that Governments the world over deliver on their promises on preventing genocide and other crimes against humanity. Never again can we let innocents suffer as they did in the Holocaust. Never again.

Jo Cox MP Bethy + Sam.

I'm not against airstrikes in principle. In fact, as part of an integrated strategy for Syria, they are almost certainly a necessary part. But airstrikes are a tactic not a strategy and outside a strategy, I fear they will fail. Everyone I have spoken to accepts that airstrikes alone will not work, yet the focus on the other elements of the strategy are too weak to be effective, too underdeveloped to be compelling. I have long argued that ISIS and Assad are not separate problems to be chosen between, but are action and reaction, cause and symptom, chicken and egg, impossible to untangle no matter how much we might like to. The brutality of Assad (who has killed seven times the number of civilians as ISIS) has helped nurture ISIS and been its main recruiting sergeant. As such, they can only be addressed together, as part of a coherent strategy. – Jo in the Huffington Post on the day of the House of Commons vote on airstrikes on Islamic State: 'With regret, I feel I have no other option but to abstain on Syria', 2 December 2015.

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## About the Authors



**Tom Tugendhat, MP**

Tom was elected as the Conservative representative in Parliament for Tonbridge, Edenbridge and Malling in May 2015. Before becoming an MP, Tom was in the British Army and served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The first draft of this report was a joint project between Tom and Jo.



**Alison McGovern, MP**

Alison McGovern became Labour's representative in Parliament for Wirral South in May 2010. In September 2016 Alison was elected co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group Friends of Syria. She was a good friend of Jo Cox.



**Professor John Bew**

John Bew is Professor of History and Foreign Policy at the War Studies Department at King's College London and heads the *Britain in the World* project at Policy Exchange, which was launched in March 2016.

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## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the help of a number of people in the making of this report. Nicola Reindorp, Jo's friend and fellow campaigner, and Deputy Executive Director at Crisis Action, acted as a steering hand in bringing the project to completion. Amy Barry, Director of di:ga Communications and a friend and former colleague of Jo's was of huge assistance to the authors in finalising the draft. Gabriel Elefteriu, National Security Research Fellow at Policy Exchange, also worked tirelessly on the project and put together the table of interventions in the appendix. Dr Maeve Ryan, of the War Studies Department at King's College London, provided invaluable historical guidance on the history of British humanitarianism, particularly the abolition of the slave trade.

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# The Cost of Doing Nothing

By Alison McGovern MP and  
Tom Tugendhat MP

Authors' Note: This paper was meant to be co-written by Tom Tugendhat and Jo Cox, the late Labour MP for Batley and Spen, and a friend and respected colleague. Tragically, Jo was murdered in her constituency just weeks before the planned publication, and just days before her forty-second birthday. Her contribution is missed. It would have undoubtedly improved this paper, but we have come together to complete the project she was working on because we know that, as a dedicated campaigner and humanitarian, Jo would have wanted us to carry on. The ideas she argued for matter and the case must still be made.

In the wake of the war in Iraq, a new anti-interventionist consensus has emerged in sections of the main UK political parties and elements of the press. Despite being from different political parties, with different views on many things, this anti-interventionism causes us both concern. It is a revival of long-held views, combined with a heightened sense of helplessness and doubt about Britain's place in the world. It unites some strange bedfellows, from members of UKIP through to the Stop the War Coalition, and by denying Britain the ability to shape events beyond its borders, it has dangerous implications for our own national security and the safety of civilians around the world.

Of course, it is vital that we learn the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan. These conflicts provide good reasons for treating the issue of interference in the affairs of other states with the greatest caution. But the correct response is not to refuse ever to act again: it is to push ourselves to make better judgments about how and when we engage. Furthermore, we must not be selective in our reading of history. We must also learn the lessons of Rwanda and Bosnia, where genocide was allowed to take place, and Kosovo and Sierra Leone, where Britain played an important and honourable role in preventing large-scale violence.

If we take a broader view, we realise that the past does not teach us to turn away completely, but to engage earlier, more comprehensively, and in concert with others. It shows that intervention – of any sort – should be predicated on an understanding of the complex drivers of instability and the detailed local and national context. And it suggests that we should commit to use the tools of diplomacy and deterrence wisely, while recognising that they will be most effective if backed up by a willingness to use military force as a last resort.

In 2005, all UN Member States committed to protect their populations from 'genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing', and agreed to 'encourage and assist states in fulfilling this responsibility' using 'appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other means'. This landmark development, known as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), was something that Jo Cox campaigned for. It

reflected a recognition that sovereignty – and the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of another state – could not be sacrosanct if there was a risk that a leader or government might murder its own people. Instead, it assumed that the claim to sovereignty was dependent on certain responsibilities, such as the protection of civilians from large-scale violence. This agreement included the understanding that military force might sometimes be necessary to halt ‘mass atrocities’. However, its real intention was to create norms – including a more expansive notion of sovereignty – which would not require the use of force to uphold.

The UK is able to wield significant ‘soft power’ to protect civilians because of our position as one of the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, our world-leading Department for International Development, our commitment to spend 0.7% of national income on aid (and our experience of doing so to help prevent conflict), our excellent diplomats, and even our organs of cultural influence such as the BBC. Where this soft power fails, economic and diplomatic sanctions and arms embargos can be successfully deployed. However, all of these important deterrents rely for optimal effectiveness on the backing of the credible threat of military force.

The willingness to act to prevent mass atrocities – and, by extension, the willingness or capacity to intervene militarily in exceptional circumstances – is an essential element of Britain’s grand strategy. For Britain to retain a positive influence in the world, and to preserve its status as an effective ally, we must be prepared to engage in other countries’ affairs. We must keep military intervention as a legitimate tool in our foreign-policy toolkit. The fundamental belief that Britain can have a positive influence in world affairs is something that has defined our foreign policy in the past, and should remain so in the future. As we prepare for Brexit, with many new international challenges emerging beyond Europe, it is ever more critical that we recognise this, and commit to thinking more seriously and rigorously about how we can affect the outcomes for civilians in conflict and retain the ability to operate overseas.

In the past few years, the quality of our national debate on conflict prevention and foreign policy crises has deteriorated, and has too often been reduced to cliché. It is common now to conflate complexity with interminability, and intervention with the use of force. In some of the debates on Syria, we have had the near equivalent of filibustering by doctrinal anti-interventionists. Talk of ‘exit strategies’ and ‘end states’ in every instance has blinded us to the wider picture. It has fostered the illusion that the UK can opt out of fundamental challenges facing our friends and allies, or vast swathes of people suffering in an ever-more connected world.

We owe it to those involved to do better and to address each question on its merits, with a full consideration of the facts. We cannot simply stand by in cases of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide. Knee-jerk isolationism, ideological pacifism and doctrinal anti-interventionism are not in Britain’s national interest, nor in the interests of the weakest and most vulnerable in the world. The current crisis in Syria shows clearly that both action and inaction are a choice and each has a consequence; it also shows what happens when the Responsibility to Protect is shirked.

Intervention – military and otherwise – has been an irreducible part of British foreign and national security policy for over two hundred years. Lurches to instinctive non-intervention have also been part of our foreign-policy cycle. But

the long view shows that the UK has done better, both for itself and the wider world, when it has championed international law, human rights and notions such as the ‘international community’ and ‘responsibility to protect’. This engaged and activist foreign policy is part of our national identity, and these values are something that other countries associate with us, and expect us to uphold.

It is highly misleading to say that interventionism does not work or that it does not save lives. History provides us with positive, negative and mixed examples: we need to learn from them all. The importance of intervention for humanitarian purposes, and of the international community’s responsibility to protect civilians wherever they were, reached its zenith in the UK in the late 1990s. Since then, Western intervention has become discredited and, in the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, populations and politicians have, understandably, come to regard it with deep suspicion.

Of course, Iraq undoubtedly demonstrates the perils of intervening militarily in the internal affairs of another country. The US-led invasion in 2003 was justified by its proponents on the grounds of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, and the violation of UN resolutions by his regime. As Saddam had committed atrocities against his own people, the prospective ‘liberation’ of the Iraqi people was also held out as a desirable outcome. The bombing campaign, which began in March 2003, quickly overwhelmed Iraqi forces and led to the collapse of the Iraqi government. Saddam was captured in December of the same year and executed three years later. However, the unintended consequences were grave. The power vacuum following his downfall created the circumstances for widespread sectarian violence and a lengthy insurgency against coalition forces.

The US formally withdrew all combat troops from Iraq in December 2011, having lost nearly 4,500 servicemen and women. The UK pulled out in 2009, having lost 179 soldiers. Figures for Iraqi civilian casualties vary widely and are disputed but are estimated to amount to at least half a million over the eight-year period. Regrets about Iraq focus on the fact that the invasion went ahead without UN sanction and in the face of widespread public opposition, and the belief that the evidence of an ‘imminent threat’ was deliberately exaggerated by the UK government under Tony Blair. The recent Chilcot report also identified serious failures of post-war planning.

Although it was a different type of intervention, the Western experience in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014 offers another cautionary tale and further underlines just how elusive ‘success’ can be. The US decision to invade Afghanistan was made in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and on the Pentagon, and was justified on the grounds of national security. The aim was to deprive al-Qaeda of a safe haven and to depose the Taliban regime that had hosted them. Britain supported the US from the start, and was later joined by other allies, before the main campaign became a NATO-led operation.

The Taliban government fell quickly in the first phase of the war, after which ‘nation-building’ became a declared aim of the Western-led coalition. Since then, a series of insurgencies and counter insurgencies have claimed thousands of lives and undermined attempts to negotiate a stable peace. The ISAF mission (including Britain’s combat mission) officially ended in 2014. It was replaced by Resolute Support, a NATO-led train, advise and assist mission. As of September 2016, this included includes over 13,000 US and Coalition personnel, with the American contingent numbering around 7,000 regular troops; the UK also has a small

training mission (and support elements) based in Kabul. There are additional US forces supporting counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan. The country remains unstable, and at least a third of the territory is not under government control or influence.<sup>1</sup> As of late August 2016, over 3,500 coalition soldiers had been killed in the war,<sup>2</sup> as well as an estimated 30,000 Afghan national security forces (ANSF) members,<sup>3</sup> and approximately 31,000 civilians.<sup>4</sup>

The failures and losses of Afghanistan and Iraq have undermined the idea that humanitarian outcomes can be delivered by military intervention. This, in turn, has fed the view that military intervention itself is flawed, and has led to increased wariness towards the efficacy of military intervention. Furthermore, it has contributed to a sense that intervention is always a military affair, as opposed to taking a number of forms, including diplomacy and aid. Finally, the idea of 'nation building' has been severely dented by the fact that it proved so costly and difficult in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Humanitarianism, interventionism and nation building are separate activities, but in the wake of Iraq and Afghanistan many people view them as linked. The dominant interpretations of and responses to Iraq and Afghanistan are justifiable. However, they are also oversimplified: they reflect a failure to take into account the existing violence in each country, and the losses and suffering that would have occurred if intervention had not taken place.

It should be remembered that Afghanistan was already riven by conflict before the Western invasion, and brutalised by many years of war (particularly by the Soviet campaign of the 1980s). And although casualty figures for the 20 years of civil war before the intervention are difficult to come by, the various estimates and descriptions of suffering must also be considered. Similarly, before 2003, Iraq was marked by the legacy of the Iran-Iraq War and the First Gulf War, and deeply scarred by the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, who was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of his own citizens.

Libya provides another example of the complexities and potential pitfalls of the use of military force to protect civilians. In 2011, the then leader, Colonel Gaddafi, was threatening to murder anyone in the city of Benghazi who was connected to the Libyan Revolution. The UK was part of a broad-based coalition that intervened to stop this. The Arab League requested the intervention and the UN Security Council passed a resolution on the basis of Responsibility to Protect, meaning that the NATO-led mission was widely perceived as legitimate. In comparison to Iraq and Afghanistan, the action was swift and decisive. Gaddafi's forces were no match for the coalition: the threatened massacre of civilians in Benghazi was prevented, and then Gaddafi himself was captured and killed by rebels in October, just seven months after the start of the intervention.

However, the operation quickly became controversial. Even before Gaddafi's downfall, UN Security Council members began to trade accusations of mission creep. Russia claimed it had been hoodwinked by the US into authorising the use of force and that the real motivation for intervention had been regime change. The aftermath of the war proved complicated, with various militias continuing to fight for control of territory among themselves and with the new state security forces. On 11 September 2012, Islamists attacked the US consulate in Benghazi, killing the US ambassador and three others. Five years on, the situation is still volatile and although a new UN-backed Government of National Accord is in place, its authority is contested by other Libyan factions. The UK and its allies have been criticised for failing to properly evaluate the 2011 rebellion and its chances of leading to a

1 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the US Congress*, October 30th, 2016 [www.sigar.mil](http://www.sigar.mil)

2 Brookings' Afghanistan Index, July 2016 <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/index20160330.pdf>

3 *Ibid.* ANSF casualty levels are difficult to pin down with precision. But Brookings estimates the total ANSF killed from 2001 through the end of 2015 to stand at approximately 25,000. The latest SIGAR report (see above) counts a further 5,523 ANSF fatalities from January 1st to August 19th 2016.

4 These are figures for strictly war-related civilian deaths, according to Brown University's *Costs of War* data-based research programme. <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/afghan>. The total human cost of the war is much greater, including non-fatal but debilitating injuries as well as *indirect* deaths caused by the war.



stable future, and for allowing an international action, initially designed to protect civilians, to morph into an effort to achieve regime change. Critics argue that failure to support the post-Gaddafi government hastened political and economic collapse and paved the way for the eventual rise of ISIS in North Africa.

This view is understandable, and there is clearly much to regret about what came to pass in Libya. It is, however, possible to see things in a different light if we consider what might have been. The intervention almost certainly saved tens of thousands from slaughter by Gaddafi and the current level of violence is nowhere near the genocide he threatened to unleash. What Libya very clearly teaches is that humanitarian arguments can be made for both intervention and non-intervention and that although the perspective of some may be negative, for the Benghazi citizens whose lives were directly threatened by Gaddafi's credible pledge to murder them 'street by street, house by house and wardrobe by wardrobe', the intervention was a success. What followed was not.

Beyond Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, there are examples of successful intervention. This suggests we should take a broader view when considering the case for – or against – the use of military force to protect civilians. For example, the establishment of a no-fly zone in northern Iraq in 1991 successfully protected the Kurds from Saddam Hussein's genocidal air attacks. This British-led initiative (which, notwithstanding RAF's contribution, was dependent on US airpower for enforcement) averted massacres and the Kurds are now playing a pivotal role in helping to roll back ISIS. More recently, in 2014, the RAF was a key contributor to the successful series of international airdrops to Yazidis stranded on Iraq's Mount Sinjar, which helped break the ISIS siege and saved thousands from slaughter.

The 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo to protect tens of thousands of Kosovar civilians threatened by Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic's campaign of ethnic cleansing is another example of success. It was controversial at the time because it went ahead without a UN Security Council Resolution. Yet NATO's Operation Allied Force was launched only after all diplomatic means had been exhausted and when not to act would have legitimised Milosevic's actions and undermined the credibility of Western institutions. There were flaws in the design – including the lack of ground troops – but overall the impact was positive: a humanitarian disaster was averted, nearly one million refugees were able to return home, and ethnic cleansing was stopped in its tracks. The NATO intervention paved the way for the creation of new country and peace for the Balkans.

The British intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000 also provides an example of what can be achieved by taking decisive action in favourable circumstances. During a brutal civil war, the rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) were waging a campaign of terror against the internationally-recognised government, using child soldiers and rape as an instrument of war. When the RUF rejected a peace agreement and threatened the capital, Britain provided vital support to the Sierra Leone Government and the UN peacekeeping mission on the ground, successfully repelling the RUF advance and paving the path to peace. General the Lord David Richards, who, as then-Brigadier, was in operational command of that mission, put success down to 'deploying a well-trained and adequate military force so quickly that the problem is paralysed'. An enabling legal and political framework (under the UN), along with unity of command and devolution of control to military forces on the ground, were the key factors in General Richards' success.

## Two examples of successful interventions

In **Kosovo**, the Albanian majority was seeking autonomy from Slobodan Milosevic's nationalist regime and its 'Greater Serbia' project. A guerrilla force, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) started attacking Serb security forces in Kosovo shortly after the signing of the Dayton Accords, in November 1995. The UN initially condemned both sides. A full conflict ensued in early 1998. Milosevic unleashed reprisals against the KLA and turned to the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. Later, a proposed international plan for deploying a NATO peacekeeping mission was rejected by Belgrade. Milosevic increased his ethnic cleansing campaign in the winter of 1998-99. NATO eventually intervened in March 1999 on humanitarian grounds by bombing Serbia (without UNSC approval).

According to the Kosovo Memory Book, 13,517 persons died, were killed or went missing during the armed conflict in Kosovo, mostly in the period from 1 January 1998 until 14 June 1999 (the end of the air campaign).<sup>5</sup> According to American assessments, some 250,000 Kosovar Albanians had already been driven out of their homes by Serb security forces before October 1998.<sup>6</sup> The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has determined that between March and June 1999 (during the NATO air campaign) 863,000 Kosovar Albanians were expelled from the province altogether.<sup>7</sup> These figures give a sense of the scale of the potential further loss of life in Kosovo, had Milosevic been allowed to prosecute his ethnic cleansing campaign without interference from the international community.

By the year 2000, civil war had been raging in **Sierra Leone** for almost a decade, displacing more than two million people and killing at least 50,000. The rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) opposed the democratically elected President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, who by 1999 was supported by a UN-mandated peacekeeping force (UNAMSIL). In 2000, fighting escalated, UN troops lost control, and the RUF – who had just rejected a peace agreement – took 500 foreign soldiers hostage. Freetown, the capital city, was on the verge of falling to the rebels. At this point, Britain took the initiative and sent in a small force, initially tasked only with securing the airport and evacuating foreign nationals from the city. The UK troops were acting without official, explicit UNSC approval but under the UN umbrella and at Kofi Annan's personal request. Once on the ground, they were so effective in securing Freetown and rescuing the hostages that the mission was expanded and had a significant effect in stabilising the entire country. The RUF agreed to a ceasefire in November 2000.

Prompt decision-making in London was essential to the quick deployment of military force, which was then manoeuvred with great skill by then-Brigadier David Richards to deliver success on the ground. The wider context was important. The Sierra Leone crisis arose shortly after Tony Blair's 1999 Chicago speech on the notion of the 'international community', in which he spoke of circumstances in which humanitarian intervention was justified, and thus presented an opportunity to translate principles into action. Secondly, the geopolitical risk of an intervention in a country on the far side of Africa was incomparably lower than had been the case in the Balkans, for example, where nuclear-armed Russia retained strong political and strategic interests.

There are also times when we did not act and the outcomes were disastrous. Bosnia and Rwanda – where the UK and international community sat back while hundreds of thousands of civilians were being killed – were formative in Jo Cox's thinking, and clearly demonstrate the price of inaction. Jo also spent time in Darfur and really believed in the 'never again' mantra that emerged after the Rwandan genocide. And she and her husband Brendan were closely connected to Bosnia and Croatia, which they visited every year to work with orphans from the war. In both Rwanda and Bosnia, earlier and more decisive Western engagement – including militarily – could have prevented suffering and brutality on a horrific scale.

<sup>5</sup> Kosovo Memory Book, <http://www.kosovomemorybook.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Asst. Sec. of State Julia V. Taft, 'US Government Humanitarian Assistance in Kosovo' USIA Press Conference, 2 October 1998.

<sup>7</sup> OSCE 'Kosovo/Kosova: As Seen, As Told', Part III, Chapter 1, available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr/17772>

### Two examples of the costs of non-intervention

In 1994, a civil war in **Rwanda** led to one of the most appalling cases of genocidal mass slaughter in modern history. Between 500,000 and 1 million Rwandan Tutsi were murdered on the command of a Hutu-led majority government from April to mid-July. When a Tutsi rebel force took control of the government, reprisals against Hutus followed, seeing an estimated 2 million displaced. The genocide followed the collapse of a shaky peace deal that had been negotiated the previous year, with international support. A number of those countries closely involved – including the US, UK, France and Belgium – were criticised for their slow response to the breakdown of peace, and their failure to do more to strengthen the existing peacekeeping force, under the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR).

In Rwanda, political debates within the international community held up intervention until it was too late. The slow response to Rwanda was also informed by the unfortunate experience of American intervention in Somalia one year previously where a US-led UN task force had been intended to create a secure environment for humanitarian and aid work to be carried out against the backdrop of a famine and the breakdown of law and order. The October 1993 Battle of Mogadishu, in which two Black Hawk helicopters were downed, saw the US military lose 18 soldiers at the hands of rebels, as well as more than a thousand Somalis killed (many of them civilians). As a result, by the time that Rwanda began to spiral out of control, the Clinton administration was much more risk averse. Yet, in Rwanda, the problem was not a lack of early warning – ample evidence and intelligence on what was to come had been available in advance – but a lack of early action. It was the failure to prevent the Rwandan genocide that, more than anything, led to the formation of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine.

The first half of the 1990s provided other sobering lessons as to how the non-interventionist impulse opened the door to worse outcomes. In the case of the **former Yugoslavia**, where a number of factions fought a bitter ethnic and nationalist war, the inadequacy of existing UN missions was exposed, as they were in Rwanda. Although he was not the only aggressor, the Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic had control of the strongest fighting force in the region. He began his ethnic cleansing campaigns in Croatia and Bosnia in 1991. Some 100,000 Bosnians eventually died; two million more were displaced. The UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was created in 1992, but its mandate was very limited (particularly to humanitarian aid convoy protection). The UN only approved no-fly zones in March 1993. In June 1993 'safe areas' were mandated on the ground in Bosnia, to protect Bosnian Muslims. Despite this, a massacre took place in Srebrenica in July 1995. More than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims, mainly boys and men, were systematically killed by Serbian troops.

In his book, *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the destruction of Bosnia*, Brendan Simms argued that Britain played a role in restraining America and NATO from intervening earlier in Bosnia. The British attitude was informed by a variety of concerns. One was that Western intervention could trigger Russian intervention on the side of the Serbs, leading to an escalation. Added to this was a sense that all sides bore equal guilt for the initial conflict, and a misplaced hope that Milosevic could be 'corralled into some sort of acceptable behaviour, and that he might be part of a stable solution, however unjust.' In any event, once intervention happened, it became clear that the costs of earlier action had been wildly overestimated – and that the caution and pessimism about early intervention had allowed the situation to deteriorate tragically.<sup>8</sup>

We are concerned that these lessons are not being heeded today in Syria, where it is estimated that more than half a million Syrians have been killed in the fighting, another two million have been displaced, and many more are suffering daily under the most egregious conditions.

In 2013, a decision was taken by the UK not to intervene in the early stages of the Syrian Civil War, after a government motion was defeated in the House of Commons. That vote – coupled with President Obama's failure to follow through on his pledge to act if President Assad crossed the US-designated 'red line' of using chemical weapons – set the scene for what followed: regional destabilisation, an unprecedented refugee crisis, further horrific humanitarian suffering, and the emergence and growth of ISIS. Western inaction also allowed others to fill the void: Russia's involvement since September 2015, and in particular the continued

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<sup>8</sup> Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia* (London: Penguin, 2002).

air support that President Putin provides to the Assad regime has prolonged the war and vastly increased casualties. In particular, the suffering and losses of the people of Aleppo were not inevitable. They followed from decisions taken – and just as significantly, decisions postponed or avoided – during the preceding years.

In acknowledging defeat in the 2013 vote, the then Prime Minister David Cameron said, ‘the British parliament, reflecting the views of the British people, does not want to see British military action. I get that and the government will act accordingly.’ And yet it is worth noting that this public opposition to intervention pre-dated the appearance of ISIS, the vast refugee crisis and the November 2015 terrorist attacks in France. Since then, with these developments bringing the conflict closer to home, public attitudes have shifted with more people thinking that we should have acted before the situation became more complicated, and the humanitarian suffering more entrenched.

As Members of Parliament, we must of course listen to and reflect the views of our constituents. But we must also lead the national debate and highlight the consequences of decisions. We must use our expertise and knowledge to make informed decisions, even if we think they will be unpopular. And rather than being too sensitive to short-term fluctuations in public opinion, we must think deeply about Britain’s place in the world, its historical position, future security, and its commitment to the Responsibility to Protect. As Edmund Burke MP famously told the voters of Bristol in 1774, ‘Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.’ This is particularly the case in foreign policy where swift and decisive action is sometimes the best means of preventing conflict.

So what can we learn and how can we move forward? Much as we may not want to confront it, the deteriorating international environment means we are likely to face more calls for intervention. The link between the ‘home’ and ‘away’ components of our national security has never been more pronounced and the collapse of international order, as well as civil war and violent conflict have an immediate negative impact on our own security, and that of our allies. The humanitarian imperative to act is as powerful today as it was in the past, if not more so. A willingness to act is often the best means of preventing conflict in the first place. This lesson is too often forgotten. As Jo argued passionately, ‘focusing on civilian protection will also make a political solution more likely’ in places like Syria, Yemen and Iraq.

Ultimately, in the face of humanitarian catastrophe, both action and inaction have consequences. To risk the lives of our soldiers and cross the borders of a sovereign country by intervening in the affairs of another nation is perhaps the most serious decision a government can make. But standing aside from modern conflicts can create other grave dangers, from vast population movements to acts of violence fomented in ungoverned spaces.

Furthermore, inaction, like action, can have second-order consequences, not least in demonstrating our willingness or otherwise to defend our allies and our interests. A willingness to act remains a key foundation stone of credible deterrence too. In so far as we value ‘red lines’, many of which the UK played a role in establishing at the end of the Second World War, it is incumbent upon us to retain the willingness and the wherewithal to enforce them. To allow genocide or ethnic cleansing to take place, or chemical or biological weapons attacks against civilians to go unchecked, is to preside over a steady deterioration of ethical norms. To watch a permanent member of the UN Security Council flagrantly ignore the basic rules of the organisation is

even worse: it threatens the very international order the UN sought to establish after the Second World War and makes further conflict more, not less, likely.

The notion of ‘world order’ evokes an image of a balance of power between powerful nations, and implies the existence of certain moral parameters. It is in those eras when a growing number of actors have transgressed *moral* as well as *legal* ‘red lines’ that we have come under most danger ourselves. Sustaining a commitment to prevention with a capacity to intervene militarily reinforces all the measures that stop short of military force – from soft power pressure and diplomacy, to aid, development and capacity building. The more we look willing to intervene, paradoxically, the less we may be called upon to do so. In the words of the Roman writer Vegetius, if you seek peace, prepare for war.

In the end doing nothing is not good enough. As Jo said in her last speech in the Commons, paraphrasing Edmund Burke, MP: ‘*Sometimes all it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.*’ Drawing on the examples outlined above we suggest some guiding principles for how Britain can act to uphold its responsibility to protect civilians and prevent mass atrocities:

- Military intervention should be saved for only the most egregious and appropriate cases; there are many other forms of pressure which can be effective.
- We should act early, on the basis of a thorough analysis of the conflict dynamics, and in concert with other actors, wielding diplomatic tools first.
- Responding quickly to unfolding events can save the most lives. Ethnic cleansing and mass atrocities often occur in the early phases of conflicts, as in Bosnia.
- Interference in the affairs of other states is an inherently political act and cannot be devolved solely to the diplomatic or military professionals: we should take a cross-government approach, drawing on the knowledge base and capabilities of all relevant ministries and agencies.
- Any intervention – military or otherwise – should be predicated on a clear strategy, with a clear goal, that calculates the probability of success and takes into account the cost of not acting.
- In the case of military intervention, the strategy should acknowledge at the outset the long-term challenges of reconstruction, political reconciliation, and economic development.
- Whatever form intervention takes, states should set explicit and limited political goals and communicate these clearly to other actors (including their opponents) to avoid violence spiralling beyond control.
- Legitimate humanitarian interventions must ideally, and where appropriate, be supported by as broad a coalition as possible and comprise international, regional, and local actors.
- Allies should anticipate and have the ability to withstand opposition from domestic constituencies and demands for early exits.
- If force is needed, using the appropriate level to avoid retaliation and further conflict is essential. Overwhelming force deters and ultimately saves lives – both of combatants and civilians.
- The credibility of military intervention depends on access to enough military power to back up a commitment to protect civilians and to prevail even if things do not go according to plan.

This list is clearly not exhaustive, and working through it will not guarantee the right decision. But it is a start, and points to what should be borne in mind when faced with a situation where civilians' lives are at risk. It suggests we should think more in terms of preventing violence and maintaining certain moral parameters rather than assuming full responsibility for winning the war, overthrowing a regime, or liberating a nation. We should be prepared to engage earlier, use more sanctions, and forge stronger alliances with those who have influence; as well as do more to provide humanitarian assistance in the form of relief. And where these measures fail, we should be willing to enforce restricted airspace, no-fly zones, or safe-havens.

We should also recognise that the UK cannot assume responsibility for everything. Britain did not cause the massacres in Rwanda or Bosnia, and was not responsible for Afghanistan's collapse into civil war, which long predated the intervention of 2001. The UK should choose to act when we have some ability to influence the situation in hand, when doing so aligns with our national interest, and where we have a reasonable chance of success. We should accept and assert that our action does not absolve nations of responsibility for determining their own futures: if the UK intervenes to prevent genocide in another country, this does not mean that all future problems in that country are the UK's responsibility. A 'responsibility to protect' does not always equate to a 'responsibility to rebuild'. Individual nations and people each have agency and must be treated as such.

Today, we should steer a middle path between the excesses of military interventionism of the 9/11 era, and an unthinking anti-interventionist reflex; avoid adventurism and overstretch, but recognise the role of the UK in maintaining a rules-based international order. The UK should pursue a foreign policy that emphasises activity rather than introspection and retrenchment. A robust commitment to prevention, which draws on our skills in the fields of development and aid, is a better fit for Britain and the world we find ourselves in, than a lazy and short-termist consensus around non-interventionism. A commitment by all parties to move in this direction would be a fitting legacy for our tireless, brave and humanitarian colleague, Jo Cox.

# Intervention and non-intervention in British foreign policy: a brief history

By Professor John Bew

*“To go to war for an idea, if the war is aggressive, not defensive, is as criminal as to go to war for territory or revenue; for it is as little justifiable to force our ideas on other people, as to compel them to submit to our will in any other respect. But there assuredly are cases in which it is allowable to go to war, without having been ourselves attacked, or threatened with attack; and it is very important that nations should make up their minds in time, as to what these cases are. There are few questions which more require to be taken in hand by ethical and political philosophers, with a view to establish some rule or criterion whereby the justifiableness of intervening in the affairs of other countries, and (what is sometimes fully as questionable) the justifiableness of refraining from any intervention, may be brought to a definite and rational test.”*

John Stuart Mill, ‘Essay on Non-Intervention’, 1859

No foreign policy issue in Britain has caused more controversy and division than that surrounding intervention in the internal affairs of other states. For almost two hundred years, since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, there have been frequent debates between the proponents of various forms of intervention overseas; and the exponents of a principle of non-intervention. The purpose of this essay is simply to provide a brief survey of these debates, from a historical perspective, and to show that intervention has been a recurrent but controversial feature of British foreign policy for at least two centuries.

It was in the nineteenth century, as Britain rose to the position of the most powerful nation on the globe, that the arguments of interventionists and non-interventionists crystallised into a form we would recognise today. At many times in our past, one or other of these positions has been in the ascendant, depending on the mood of the day or the circumstances faced by those in office. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, wrote his famous state paper of 1820 that laid out the ‘principle of non-intervention’. Castlereagh’s successor, George Canning, followed a similar approach, preferring to focus on Britain’s ‘blue-water’ empire than on costly entanglements in Europe.

Yet, while non-intervention was the preferred starting position, it was never an agreed doctrine. During the Napoleonic Wars, and indeed before that, Britain had often interfered in the internal affairs of other sovereign states. As early as 1827, the country engaged in what later became known as the first humanitarian intervention –



following the sending of the Royal Navy to the Bay of Navarino during the Greek War of Independence. Despite its popularity with a significant section of the press and public, the Battle of Navarino in 1827 was regarded by the government as a mistake and an ‘aberration’, in that it flouted the laws of nations. The commander of the fleet, Admiral Codrington, over-extended his brief in opening fire on the Ottoman-Egyptian fleet (partly because of his own humanitarian concerns, having heard tales of ethnic cleansing of the Greeks on land).<sup>9</sup> But the precedent was set and the concept of ‘humanitarian intervention’ was born, in a form that we recognise today.<sup>10</sup>

As the principle of non-intervention was eroded by the force of events, later generations sought to develop new principles to deal with cases in which humanitarian crises unfolded but where national interests and great power politics also played a part. It is now more than 150 years since the English liberal writer, John Stuart Mill, produced his 1859 essay, ‘A Few Words on Non-Intervention’. As Mill understood, when it came to interference in the internal affairs of other states, there could not be hard and fast rules of conduct. Much depended on the specific context of each case, and every decision involving intervention had to be carefully calibrated. Nonetheless, in 1859, Mill suggested we might try to establish ‘some rule or criterion whereby the justifiableness of intervening in the affairs of other countries, and (what is sometimes equally questionable) the justifiableness of refraining from intervention, may be brought to a definite and rational test’. A century and a half later, we have clearer international rules, such as the Responsibility to Protect. Yet the fact is that no simple criteria exist in confronting these periodic crises, and we find ourselves rehearsing remarkably similar dilemmas.

When Mill wrote his essay, he was addressing the idea of non-intervention, which was in the ascendant at the time, following the experience of the Crimean War. This gives his words a certain resonance today when much non-interventionism can be ascribed to the legacy of the 2003 Iraq war. Mill recognised that the preferred position of the British political class was to stay aloof from the internal affairs of other states and to concentrate on trade. He did not regard this as an ignoble instinct. Instead, his aim was to show that non-interventionism would not work as an absolute principle; or at least, it depended on certain assumptions that were likely to come under strain. Mill was not an avowed supporter of intervention. But he worried that the idea of non-interventionism was based on some lazy assumptions that would not stand the test of time.

As Mill suspected, before long, events would force Britain to intervene once again. In many cases, it was common for strategic and humanitarian concerns to become entangled. In an echo of more recent times, it was often events in the Levant and Middle East that shook Britain out of its preferred non-intervention stance. In 1860, less than a year after Mill’s essay was published, Britain and France sent a joint force to modern-day Syria and Lebanon following the collapse of the Ottoman governing authority and the massacre of thousands of Maronite Christians in Damascus and Sidon. The intervention, according to the French and British foreign secretaries at the time, was an ‘oeuvre d’humanité’ that included the protection of civilians, medical aid, the burying of corpses and the cleaning of streets.<sup>11</sup>

There are many controversial aspects to British foreign policy in the nineteenth century, from the Opium War to the expansion of the Empire. Nonetheless, humanitarian concerns also played a significant part. The most famous instance of humanitarian intervention in nineteenth-century British foreign policy was

9 J. Bew, ‘Intervention in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars’, in Brendan Simms and David Trim (eds.), *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 117-138.

10 Gary J. Bass, *Freedom’s Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention* (Vintage Books: New York, 2009).

11 John Bew, ‘Las Vegas Rules Don’t Apply in Syria’, *New Statesman*, 10 July 2013, <http://www.newstatesman.com/2013/07/las-vegas-rules-dont-apply-syria>

the campaign to abolish the slave trade. While this is almost universally celebrated today, it was extremely controversial at the time. Not everyone was comfortable with the effects of abolitionism – from gunboat diplomacy to unilateral displays of force and interference in the sovereignty of other nations. Many MPs and diplomats, from across the political spectrum, viewed Lord Palmerston's activist foreign policy as dangerous and likely to cause war. Over the longer-term, anti-slavery campaigning was an intervention that lasted almost a century and was incredibly costly, both financially and in terms of lives lost. It was almost halted on several occasions – subjected to heavy criticism from the anti-intervention lobby, free traders, and those who felt that Britain had no obligation (or right) to interfere in the enslavement of Africans by foreign powers.

And so the controversies around intervention continued, along with the arguments between those who supported and those who opposed it. By the end of the nineteenth century, Lord Salisbury bemoaned the 'practice of foreign interventions in domestic squabbles' as he looked back on the history of the last seventy years, 'strewn with the wrecks of national prosperity which these well-meant interventions have caused.'<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding these controversies, it is important to realise that the deployment of force for humanitarian purposes has a long lineage, stretching back more than two centuries. This belies the notion that it was a passing phase of late twentieth century history, or a Western indulgence following the end of the Cold War.

The twentieth century tells a similar story. Setting aside the First and Second World Wars, Britain continued to intervene in the affairs of other states – often with a humanitarian justification, though this was always contested. In some cases, the aim was to protect and stabilise existing governments, such as Britain's intervention in the Greek civil war (1944-8), designed to prevent the Greek government falling to a Communist insurgency. In several other cases, Britain intervened as part of a multi-national force, such as the sending of a small peacekeeping force to Lebanon in 1982-4 and Bosnia in the early 1990s. A variety of methods have been deployed over the years. While seapower was the predominant tool in the nineteenth century, this was increasingly taken over by airpower in the course of the twentieth century, as can be seen in the Kosovo and Libya interventions of 1999 and 2011. Putting 'boots on the ground' has always been the most controversial and difficult form of intervention and remains so today.<sup>13</sup>

After 1945, questions of intervention and non-intervention must be understood against the backdrop of the existence of the United Nations. Yet this has not made the issue any less controversial. Over the course of the last seventy years, some progress has been made towards establishing norms to govern conduct in these cases. Yet even these have been fiercely contested. It was not until the 1990s that notions such as 'humanitarian intervention' and 'responsibility to protect' (R2P) reached their fullest expression. This signalled an evolutionary leap in our understanding of sovereignty by making it contingent on the protection of civilian populations from mass abuse of human rights.<sup>14</sup> In some interpretations, the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo might be regarded as the high-water mark for R2P as an operative principle in international affairs.<sup>15</sup> And yet, at the time of the 2011 intervention in Libya, for example, the UN Security Council passed a resolution explicitly based on R2P for the first time (since the doctrine had been endorsed, in principle, by the UN General Assembly in 2005).

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12 J. Bew, 'Intervention in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars', in Simms and Trim, *Humanitarian Intervention: A History*, pp. 117-138.

13 See Appendix One which is a rough estimate of interventions undertaken by Britain since 1815.

14 James Pattison (ed.), *Humanitarian Intervention* (SAGE Library of International Relations), p. xxix-xviii.

15 Andrew Cottey, 'The Kosovo War in Perspective', *International Affairs* (May 2009), Volume 85, Issue 3, pp. 593-608

For many years, the UK has seen itself as part of a broader ‘international community’. From that starting point, Britain has been a world leader in championing international law, human rights and notions such as the ‘international community’ and ‘responsibility to protect’. In more recent times, however, Britain has stepped back from this leading role. To a great extent, this is a product of war weariness after years of over-extension in Iraq and Afghanistan, and fear of becoming more deeply involved in places such as Libya and Syria.

It falls upon those who do not want to see the UK retreat from an activist role on humanitarian questions – and in preserving the norms of the post-1945 international system – to make their case more effectively, in the face of growing scepticism on the part of the public. At the same time, the broader strategic context must be remembered and explained more effectively. The willingness to deploy force with a view to preferred humanitarian or desirable political outcomes bolsters deterrence and compellence, the maintenance of key alliances, the management of international order, and strengthens the array of soft power levers that Britain has at its disposal.

The temptation of a doctrine of non-intervention is that it seems less risky. Yet this must come with some recognition of the price. Standing on the sidelines can be as much of a strategic and moral choice as intervention. When we choose not to intervene, it normally follows that others – and not our allies, or those with whom we share certain values – do so in our stead. The example of Russia’s intervention in Syria is one case in point. But this is much the same reason why non-intervention has often unravelled in past eras too. As John Stuart Mill argued in 1859, ‘The doctrine of non-intervention, to be a legitimate principle of morality, must be accepted by all governments. The despots must consent to be bound by it as well as the free States. Unless they do, the profession of it by free countries comes but to this miserable issue, that the wrong side may help the wrong, but the right must not help the right.’ These words have a certain poignancy today.

While the UK could act unilaterally against the global slave trade in the nineteenth century, it has neither the appetite nor the capacity to assume a similar role today. In our age, the most desirable platform for a humanitarian mission is to have the acquiescence and sanction of the highest international authority – namely a UN Security Council resolution. That said, there are other options stopping short of this. The Kosovo intervention of 1999, for example, was undertaken without UN sanction. The process need not always be led from the UN but by a broader coalition of willing states. There have been NATO-led missions, EU-led missions (deployed in Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2006, and in Chad and the Central African Republic since 2007), or African Union-led missions, such as the sending of peacekeeping troops to Burundi.

One of the many assets that Britain does have is an array of tools which sometimes falls under the bracket of ‘soft power’. As Professor Joseph Nye writes, ‘sometimes one can get the outcome one wants by setting the agenda’.<sup>16</sup> It has long been part of British strategy to assume the role of the impartial arbiter in matters of dispute. This is something that has manifested itself both in conflict resolution and multilateral diplomacy, and on which the UK has placed great stock in recent years. Yet such ‘soft power’, conflict resolution and diplomatic capabilities do not exist in a vacuum.

In many cases, the success of what might be called ‘pre-intervention diplomacy’ – conflict prevention, diplomatic pressure, and economic sanctions – depends on

16 Joseph Nye, *The Power to Lead* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 9.

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a level of credibility that is hard won, and too easily lost.<sup>17</sup> These are carefully nurtured assets that derive from our prominent historical role in creating the international rules and obligations we ask others to abide by. Above all, they are a product of our historical willingness to share the burden for international security, and to take risks to maintain it, in cooperation with our main allies.

There is a growing recognition that these challenges transcend party politics, and must be addressed with a clearer understanding of how the UK national interest ties into the existing international order. Writing in the *Fabian Review* in January 2016, RUSI's Malcolm Chalmers argued that the 'the post-1945 rules-based international order is not automatically self-preserving' and that it needed to be 'nurtured and maintained'. He warned about the dangers of the UK 'refusing to take part in any military operations beyond purely national protection' and 'walking away from its international responsibilities'.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in April 2016, former Foreign Secretary William Hague expressed concern about an 'enfeebling ... reluctance to send force overseas just when we will have a vital need to do so.' In the future, Hague warned, 'intervention – to try to prevent conflict, end wars, stabilise governments and create economic improvements – will be a completely unavoidable necessity for many Western nations.'<sup>19</sup>

Much as we hoped that these were things of the past, large-scale humanitarian crises, the maiming and murder of civilian populations on an industrial scale, ethnic cleansing and other war crimes are likely to confront us again in the future. The UK need not be, and should not seek to be, a global police officer. It must be humbler and more prudent than it has been in the past. But we should think long and hard before abandoning our role in burden-sharing with our allies, and in protecting the norms we have helped to establish and which have saved many thousands of lives in the past.

17 This is a point made by Gwyn Prins, *The Heart of War: On Power, Conflict and Obligation in the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge: London and New York, 2002), p. 138.

18 <http://www.fabians.org.uk/beyond-iraq-the-future-of-military-intervention/>

19 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/04/25/we-cant-now-turn-our-backs-on-the-chaos-in-the-middle-east/>

# Appendix One: British Interventions Since the End of the Napoleonic Wars

Note: This is necessarily a 'rough estimate', given the ambiguities surrounding the terms of various interventions and the frequent blurring of strategic and humanitarian justification. Moreover, it does not include the many instances in which Britain stopped far short of intervention but did put diplomatic pressure on other states or sought to arbitrate in violent disputes and civil wars.

- Excluding campaigns against rebel groups/insurgencies in British-held territories/colonies.
- Excluding colonial campaigns.
- Excluding formal, state on state wars and direct follow-ups (e.g. Russian Civil War; Turkish War of Independence)

Instance & background	Justification	Method	Outcome
<i>Greek War of Independence (1820–1830)</i>	Support for the Greek rebels against the repressive Turkish rule.	First, Britain took a series of measures, short of armed intervention, in support of the rebels (e.g. financial help, diplomatic pressure on the Turks etc). Later, Britain mediated international efforts to solve the crisis diplomatically. But on the ground, the parties continued to fight. Britain then sent warships to enforce the terms of a treaty, but eventually these were drawn into the battle of Navarino.	Britain continued its diplomatic engagement, backed by military force, as part of a complex international intervention in the Greek question. Eventually, Greece gained independence from the Ottoman Empire.
<i>Irish and German Mercenary Soldiers' Revolt in Brazil (1828)</i>	Support for a friendly power. Intervention at the request of legitimate local government (Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro I)	Marines aboard British ships docked in Rio de Janeiro were sent ashore against the mutineers.	The mutiny was defeated.
<i>Portuguese Civil War (1828–1834)</i>	Support to Dom Pedro against the 'usurper' Miguel. Britain had a longstanding alliance with Portugal and considerable commercial interests in the country.	Armed (naval) intervention in support of the Liberals.	The absolutist claimant to the throne was defeated.
<i>First Carlist War (1833–1840)</i>	Support for the legitimate (and Liberal) government of Spain at the time.	Provision of financial loans and <i>indirect</i> military support (via the <i>volunteer</i> Auxiliary British Legion) to the (Liberal) Spanish regency.	Carlist defeat.
<i>Suppression of maritime slave trade (1807–1866, Atlantic campaign; 1808–1896, Indian Ocean campaign)</i>	Abolition of Slave Trade Act 1807 abolished slave trade throughout the British Empire. Slavery itself was abolished in most of the British Empire in 1833.	West Africa Squadron established for the purpose in 1808. Also, actions against African rulers and coastal slave trading hotspots. Internationally, Britain used subsidies and diplomacy (including, at times, gunboat diplomacy) to press other countries to pass similar slave trade acts and allow Royal Navy to inspect their ships for slaves.	Eventually the cooperation of the United States was also secured. The last trans-Atlantic slave trading ship was halted in 1867. British naval intervention was less successful in the Indian Ocean. The Arabian slave trade continued until at least 1922.

<i>First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–1842)</i> <i>[not strictly an ‘intervention’]</i>	Officially: Supporting the ‘legitimate’ (but deposed) King Shuja ‘against foreign interference and factious opposition.’ The strategic justification was to thwart supposed Russian plans to take over Afghanistan.	British expedition to Kabul in order to reinstate Shuja. Military occupation and subsequent Afghan rebellion against occupying forces.	Disastrous British military retreat from Kabul, followed by a brief re-take of Kabul and reprisals, before a final evacuation of Afghanistan by British forces. Previous Afghan ruler (Dost Mohammed) returned to power.
<i>Second Egyptian-Ottoman War (1839–1841)</i>	Support for the Ottoman Sultan against the ‘rebel’ Mehmet Ali. Technically, Britain was enforcing the Convention of London (1840) between Mehmet Ali and the Sultan.	Royal Navy actions (with Austrian naval support) against the Egyptian fleet in Alexandria, and against Acre in Syria.	After the fall of Acre, Mehmet Ali accepted the Convention of London and withdrew from occupied territories where Ottoman authority was re-established.
<i>Uruguayan Civil War (1839–1851)</i>	Support for the Liberal faction in besieged Montevideo.	Royal Navy actions (in conjunction with French ships), including the blockade of Rio de la Plata, as well as regular British troops deployed onshore for the defence of Montevideo.	Britain and France negotiated their withdrawal from the conflict in 1850.
<i>Anglo-Egyptian War (1882)</i>	Support for the Khedive of Egypt against the rebel Urabi.	Bombardment of Alexandria followed by ground campaign against Urabi’s forces.	Khedive’s authority restored. British occupation forces left behind to ensure security.
<i>Ikhwan Raids in Jordan (1924) and Kuwait (1929)</i>	British support for the Emir of Transjordan and for the Sheikh of Kuwait (both countries were British protectorates).	RAF operations in Transjordan and Kuwait.	Rebellion was defeated. Ikhwan leadership was eliminated, and the remains of the organisation were eventually incorporated into regular Saudi units.
<i>China (Nanking, Shanghai) (1927-1939)</i>	British forces joined an international coalition to protect Shanghai’s European Quarter at the start of the Chinese civil war. Similar actions took place at Nanking.	At Shanghai, Britain sent troops and formed the Shanghai Defence Force. At Nanking, Royal Navy and American ships bombarded the city and landed marines to defend foreign residents in the midst of looting and rioting caused by the advance of the Chinese nationalist army (NRA).	At Shanghai, tensions eased (without any fighting) and British forces were withdrawn after a few months. At Nanking, NRA commanders eventually brought their troops in line and restored order. The Red Cross mediated a ceasefire with the Anglo-American vessels. Later, the Kuomintang reached agreements with US and UK to settle the damages and issue apologies.
<i>Indonesian National Revolution (1945–1949)</i>	Involvement as ‘caretaker’ administration until the planned restoration of Dutch control, following Japanese surrender in WWII. British troops drawn into clashes with revolutionary Indonesian factions.	British, Indian and Australian troops gradually took over parts and cities of Indonesia, proceeding with the processing of surrendered Japanese troops and liberated Allied prisoners of war, as well as the evacuation of Indo-European civilians. Clashes escalated to a large-scale battle (at Surabaya).	British troops were pulled out in November 1946 as the Dutch took over the campaign. Eventually, Britain dropped its support for restoring Dutch control and helped first to broker an agreement between Republicans and the Dutch, and then to support Indonesian independence outright.
<i>Greek Civil War (1944–1948)</i>	Support for the legitimate democratic Greek government against Communist rebels.	British troops entered Greece as the Germans withdrew. Initially, urban fighting by regular British army troops against Communist forces, mainly in Athens.	The Communists were defeated militarily.
<i>Korea (1951-1953)</i>	Support for South Korea as part of an international UN-mandated, US-led force.	Conventional military operations.	Korean Armistice Agreement of 27 July 1953.
<i>Jebel Akhdar War (Oman) (1954-1959)</i>	Support for the legitimate Sultan of Oman against a rebel Imam. Britain also had large oil interests to protect in Oman.	Sultan’s army re-organised under British command. Direct British Army, RAF and SAS intervention.	Rebels defeated.
<i>Suez Crisis (1956–1957)</i>	Reversing Nasser’s nationalisation of the Suez canal. Wider considerations of maintaining British prestige in the region.	Conventional military operations.	United Nations created the UNEF Peacekeepers to police the Egyptian–Israeli border.

<i>Oman (Jebel Akhdar War) (1957-1959)</i>	Support for the Sultan of Oman against a Saudi-backed insurgency.	1959: RAF planes initially sent in, followed by ground troops.	Rebellion defeated.
<i>Kuwait (1961)</i>	Response to a call for protection from independent Kuwait which faced Iraqi territorial claims.	A British task force of an aircraft carrier, several destroyers and half a brigade of troops was sent to the country (Operation Vantage). No shots were fired.	Iraq did not attack and the British forces were replaced by the Arab League.
<i>Indonesian–Malaysian conflict (1963–1966)</i>	British (and Commonwealth) support for Malaysian forces, at Malaysian Government's request. This was an undeclared war rooted in Indonesia's opposition to the creation of Malaysia.	Regular defence operations, plus Operation Claret (British raids across the border, with both special and conventional forces) which was entirely classified at the time. Commonwealth forces deployment to Borneo peaked at 17,000.	After Suharto replaced Sukarno, Indonesia started moving towards peace, which was achieved in August 1966.
<i>Dhofar Rebellion (Oman) (1962–1976)</i>	British support for the legitimate Sultan against the rebels.	Hearts and minds campaign by SAS and Royal Engineers, on the Malayan model.	Rebellion eventually defeated.
<i>Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970)</i>	British support for the Federal Government. Britain sucked into the conflict by the need to protect its large oil and mining interests in the country. (France supported rival Biafra.)	UK support consisted of financial subsidies, weapons, intelligence. No direct military intervention. A humanitarian crisis developed in Biafra.	Biafran rebellion defeated by the Federal Government.
<i>Multinational Force in Lebanon (1982–1984)</i>	UN peacekeeping force deployed at the request of Lebanon. The initial mission was to oversee the withdrawal of the PLO.	The Queen's Dragoon Guards were deployed in Beirut for eleven months from February 1983. They did not sustain any casualties, but the overall UN peacekeeping mission was a failure.	The UN force was dissolved following the October 1983 Beirut barracks bombing.
<i>Gulf War (1991)</i>	UNSC Resolution 678 authorised the use of 'all necessary means' to force Iraq to withdraw and to restore international peace and security.	Conventional military operations.	Ceasefire, enshrined in UNSC Resolution 687.
<i>Operation Haven (Iraq, 1991)</i>	UNSC Resolution 688 demanded that Iraq ended its repression of the Kurds and requested international humanitarian assistance for Kurdish refugees.	The British Government led the international efforts to constitute Operation Provide Comfort in support of the Kurds. Britain provided the main ground force (under UK-led Operation Haven) centred around 3 Commando Brigade (plus a Dutch contingent) which advanced into Northern Iraq from Turkey and established a safe haven for returning Kurdish refugees.	The British-Dutch troops withdrew back into Turkey in late 1991, upon successful completion of their mission to protect and help re-settle Kurdish refugees.
<i>Bosnian War (1992–96)</i>	After the Srebrenica and Markale massacres, NATO intervened (at UN request) in 1995 with Operation Deliberate Force (air support for UNPROFOR which had been deployed in Bosnia since 1992).	UNSC Resolution 836 authorised the use of force by UNPROFOR in the protection of specially designated safe zones (June 1993).	Dayton Accords. British troops weren't fully withdrawn until 2007.
<i>Operation Desert Fox (1998)</i>	Operations to enforce Iraq's disarmament as per terms of ceasefire. The legal argument was that the authorisation to use force, given by Resolution 678, had not been terminated by (ceasefire) Resolution 687.	Four-day air and cruise-missile bombing campaign by UK and US.	The US declared the operation a success.
<i>Kosovo War (1998–1999)</i>	NATO intervention was justified on grounds of the threat to regional stability posed by events in Kosovo. There was no UNSC authorisation.	Air bombing campaign.	Serbia accepted the terms of the international peace plan. Deployment of NATO-led peacekeeping force KFOR under Gen Mike Jackson.



<i>Sierra Leone Civil War (2000–2002)</i>	UN peacekeepers held hostage by the Revolutionary United Front. British spearhead force (700-strong) sent in to evacuate foreign nationals from Freetown and secure the country. This was a unilateral action by Britain without formal UNSC approval. Operation Palliser was grounded in humanitarian policies of restoring law and order and support the elected government.	The mission eventually expanded beyond evacuation to assisting and training UN and Sierra Leone Army forces ranged against the rebels. Later, Operation Barras rescued UK soldiers captured by militias.	Continued UK military involvement and diplomatic efforts via the UN, together with pressure on Liberia, eventually pushed the rebels to start disarming and then to sign a ceasefire agreement.
<i>War in Afghanistan (2001–2014)</i>	Military action under NATO Article 5 invoked by the US after 9/11.	Counter-insurgency campaign coupled with state-building and post-conflict reconstruction, as part of ISAF.	UK's combat mission (Operation Herrick) ended in October 2014. A small number of British troops remained in Afghanistan to provide training to the Afghan National Army, under Operation Total, part of NATO's Operation Resolute Support.
<i>Iraq War (2003–2009)</i>	UK/US argued that Saddam was in breach of previous UNSC resolutions. They claimed this gave them a moral right to intervene; and also voided the ceasefire after the 1st Gulf War, making the 2003 invasion technically a resumption of the 1991 hostilities and not a 'new' war.	Counter-insurgency campaign (Operation Telic).	The bulk of British forces were withdrawn in 2009, with a training mission continuing until 2011.
<i>Libyan Civil War (2011)</i>	UNSC resolution authorising NATO to enforce a no-fly zone over parts of Libya (Operation Unified Protector).	Air and cruise missile bombing campaign leading to regime change.	The NATO mission ended in October 2011.
<i>Mali (2013)</i>	Support for French forces leading Operation Serval, which was authorised by UNSC and undertaken at the request of the host country. HMG gave assurances that no troops were destined for combat roles. There was no debate and no vote in the Commons before deployment (given it was not a combat mission).	Two C-17 Globemaster III strategic transport planes, a Sentinel R1, and a small number of British troops deployed as 'advisers'. The troops were deployed as part of EU's Training Mission in Mali.	Operation Serval ended in July 2014. The EU training mission continues.
<i>Military intervention against ISIL (2014–present)</i>	Action in Iraq: support for the legitimate government of Iraq, at Iraqi request. Syria: the main legal basis for UK military action in Syria is collective self-defence of Iraq, with the individual self-defence of the UK and collective self-defence of other states (but not Security Council authorisation) as additional legal bases.	Airstrikes against ISIL targets in Iraq, and training assistance to Iraqi and Peshmerga forces. Airstrikes against ISIL targets in Syria.	Ongoing operations.





“There are few more complex questions than when to intervene overseas. Jo Cox was an inspirational humanitarian who cared deeply about preventing violence and protecting people around the world. It is a fitting part of Jo’s legacy that this paper will challenge politicians of all parties to consider how we can put such considerations at the heart of the decisions we take.”

**Rt Hon Theresa May MP, Prime Minister**

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Policy Exchange  
8 - 10 Great George Street  
Westminster  
London SW1P 3AE

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