The Afghan debate

The Opposition in the debate was most disappointing. Labour and the SNP concentrated on demanding the UK takes more refugees more quickly. The SNP leader was unable to answer why Scottish local authorities had not reflected his policy in their actions. Labour was unwilling to get into the detail of who else they thought should be aboard our flights back to the UK or how the hard working operation at Kabul airport could be expanded and speeded up given the pressures on the runway and processing capacity in a situation which needs to meet the needs of many countries. They were unwilling to consider the issue of our national security and the steps that need to be taken to keep us safe against the possibility that the new Afghanistan will harbour or even encourage more terrorists hostile to the USA and her allies.

The Opposition also wished to blame President Trump as well as President Biden for the disaster, and of course had no sympathy for the view that the UK government had little choice once the USA pulled out her military presence unilaterally without considering the needs and wishes of the Afghan government. The MPs who took this approach clearly had not read the Doha Agreement as they seemed to think President Biden merely implemented that. If only. That Agreement required the Taliban to enter talks with the Afghan government and other political groups to seek an agreement. It made US final withdrawal conditional on Taliban good conduct. President Trump did not rush to remove all military support following the Agreement despite the election where he would doubtless liked to have reported a full exit.

The debate needed to discuss more what military intervention can achieve, and to consider more what political and diplomatic effort has to go in to follow up military intervention. You cannot defeat an ideology by force of arms alone if at all. You need to combat the ideas behind it in the minds of the people. South Korea has become a stable and much more prosperous society after the Korean war . The success of western style policies to promote economic growth there has been welcomed by citizens. The USA has been patient and has kept a substantial military presence there for many years which has deterred North Korean excursions across the border with the south. There has been no need for the USA or the West to fight, and the world has not doubted the West’s resolve.

It is no solution to the troubles of current Afghanistan for western MPs to grandstand their conscience by saying we need to allow in more refugees. Afghanistan needs her brightest and best, her educated and enterprising to give her a chance of a journey to greater prosperity and happiness. The more you encourage to come to the West, the more the millions who cannot or will not make the journey suffer. It seems that the Opposition think the UK should welcome in all the people most equipped to offer their homeland the chance of change for the better. I want to see the West use its diplomatic and economic might to tempt Afghanistan to the paths of peace and prosperity. I understand that is not an easy choice. After President Biden’s bad decision to leave in a hurry we are left with needing to use diplomacy, influence and economic sanctions to try to encourage good conduct and rein in violent

excess. The West after all accepts that in the cases of several powerful authoritarian regimes who do not share our values it does not have a realistic military option that it would use in anything short of a major emergency or direct threat from the country concerned. The IMF are right to withhold cash from Afghanistan. The UK should draw up a G7 set of demands of the next Afghan government that they will need to meet to get international cash and to avoid major trade and banking sanctions.