

## Too many wars

As a teenager I was shocked to read of the horrors of the Great War of 1914-18, and to hear a little of the reality from my two grandfathers who both fought in the trenches and survived. My study of what was called English history which was really UK history made me think the UK had fought too many wars, being dragged into many continental conflicts for no good reason.

I am no pacifist. I understand there are violent and dangerous countries that may wish us harm. Indeed having stronger defence forces than we currently enjoy seems like a good insurance policy and a necessary statement to put a hostile power off challenging us. We needed force to liberate the Falklands from the senseless and violent Argentinian invasion, and to help the USA liberate Kuwait from an unwanted occupation. There may be other such needs in the years ahead.

Throughout the last 500 years of our history we have sought to prevent a single dominant power taking over much of Europe by force. In the sixteenth century we with the Dutch resisted Spanish attempts to add the low countries and England to their continental empire. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we worked with a coalition of other states to prevent French military domination of the continent, culminating at the turn of the nineteenth century in the great victories of Trafalgar and Waterloo to end Napoleon's empire building based on his large and threatening armies. In the twentieth century we twice fought against German domination of the continent. Today we have no issues with the EU emerging as a single force on the continent. We made the sensible decision not to join them, as our interests are global and based on trade, investment and contacts with the wider world. We should leave most continental political issues to our neighbours to resolve through their elected member states governments and through their strong centralised law making at EU level.

Foreign policy obviously looks very different from Warsaw which is closer to Moscow than to London, or in Berlin so much closer to the eastern borders of the EU than the UK is. Countries with continental land borders may choose closer agreements and arrangements with their neighbours to regulate their affairs. The UK is right to condemn Russian aggression and spiteful violence towards Ukraine and to help as a non combatant with other allies. The big issues about Ukraine's European status, possible membership of the EU and development of the Association Agreement are not matters we can or should wish to get involved with. We wish to see the end of the war and the dreadful violence and damage being done but we should not wish to influence the political settlement which has to follow. The main protagonists are Ukraine who need to resolve their own future, and Russia. Ukraine may want more help from the EU which they wish to join given its role in the conflict and its interest in future governing arrangements for Ukraine.