

## Moderating posts

I have deleted a number of posts today, as I am short of time. I have deleted some without reading because they were very long, and some which are very repetitious in nature, as well as deleting many with attached links to sites I have not read.

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## We need a Statement on Syria

I trust tomorrow when Parliament meets the government will update us on its thinking on Syria and give MPs every opportunity to examine the position now reached.

I assume the limited action the UK took with allies early on Saturday morning is the end of the military intervention planned following the use of chemical weapons in Syria. I stressed before the event that we should not fly our jets into Syrian airspace, run the risk of killing Russian personnel and damaging Russian equipment, and risking killing civilians. It appears we have avoided all of those dangers. It is now important we show we do not intend to escalate from here. I am glad the PM did tell us she has no plan to intervene in the civil war or seek regime change as those options would require considerable and sustained force and be full of risk.

Labour will doubtless wish to explore the legal base for the action.

Many MPs will want to know how successful it was in destroying chemical weapons production facilities and chemical weapons stocks, the stated targets. We await the full Intelligence evaluation and assume Russian claims to have shot down most of the missiles are false. We will also wish to be reassured that attacking chemical weapons stocks did not lead to damaging release of any of the chemicals, or to the death or injury of people on the ground.

It will also be interesting to hear the governments evaluation of whether this will either prevent or deter future use of these munitions by the Syrian regime. Has the attack crippled their capacity to make and use these weapons? Or did it do such damage that they will conclude it is not a good idea to do it again?

There should be no escalation of this action and a careful consideration of the results of this mission.

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# The international order, Russia and the rules based system

We constantly hear these days that there is a rules based international order which all decent states follow. Russia is condemned for not following these same rules.

Those who think like this usually divide the world up into a majority of states who follow these rules, and a minority of rogue states like North Korea who pose problems for the rest. When it is one of the world's larger military powers who has greater diplomatic reach, some world support and a seat on the UN Security Council that does not follow the world order this analysis has its limitations.

I am no apologist for Russia, and understand the ruthless pursuit of Russian interests by that state can lead to unacceptable conduct. I condemn atrocities and illegal acts whichever state carries them out when they are reported and proved.

The truth is there is no one set of rules, no single world order that is codified in many areas of government activity which every state should obey. Within NATO and the advanced west there are varying rules of law. The USA has its own set of laws and legal constraints on the actions of its President and senior officials. The EU has another set of laws and legal requirements on its member states. The EU will not accept all the US rules, and will certainly not accept US jurisdiction, nor will the USA of course accept EU rules and control.

The West does come together in some world bodies and helps shape a global approach. There are world trade rules supervised by the WTO which all members accept, though the USA currently feels those rules are not fairly administered with regards to China and Germany. There are important conventions on nuclear and chemical weapons which most countries have signed. North Korea becoming a nuclear power and alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria causes problems under these global rules. As the current disputes reveal, the countries accused of breaking world rules often argue they have not. China and Germany pose as supporters of a world free trade order, whilst the USA cites evidence that they are not. The West rightly condemns chemical attacks in Syria, only to be told by Russia that no such attack has happened.

The main countries and blocs appeal to world rules when it suits them, and seek to interpret them in directions which fit with their national interests. Russia clearly plays by different rules to the West in several respects. In Syria it will accept more deaths as the regime seeks to restore its control over the country, as Russia judges an Assad government to be the least bad outcome. The West is against both ISIS and Assad, but lacks the power and commitment to enforce a different government on that country, whilst condemning the many deaths the current civil war is causing.

Those who protest most about the need to create and follow a rules based system need to be punctilious themselves to obey it. Any Western military intervention in Syria today will need a legal base, made more difficult by Russia's veto of any UN Resolution which could directly support action. The UN is a world body which comes closest to providing a rules based system for the conduct of diplomacy and where unavoidable to regulate the use of force between states. That body cannot have a clear single view or straightforward rule where the Security Council is divided and where a veto has been wielded.

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## [Visit to Beckton Dickinson](#)

I visited Beckton Dickinson at Winnersh Triangle this morning at their request. They are a fast growing medical supply company owned by an American business. They have several testing laboratories and office accommodation at Winnersh to run the UK arm of this multinational business.

We mainly discussed how new technology and smarter products can help UK medical staff in the NHS achieve higher standards of care and treatment. The Secretary of State is keen that the NHS has an open culture towards mistakes, resulting in continuous improvement to reduce harm to patients through unintended error. Beckton Dickinson aim to produce products used in medical treatment that can assist with accuracy and good outcomes.

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## [German views of the EU and Brexit](#)

On Wednesday morning the Today programme had the good idea of going to Germany to find out what they are thinking about the EU and Brexit. A few patsy interviews later we were little the wiser. There was no cross examination of how Germany is changing, with the Eurosceptic AfD now the official Opposition and the CSU moving sharply in an anti migrant direction. There was no proper examination of what the German government will now do post Brexit in response to Macron's wish to push ahead with political Union and a common budget. There was no discussion at all about the 900 billion Euros Germany is lending the weaker members of the zone at zero interest through the ECB. I would like to have heard what Germany thinks about the pace and style of more integration, how they wish to change the budget after our departure and above all how they will tackle the need for more transfers around the Euro area to help the struggling members with high unemployment.

Instead the BBC was keen to get a few German interviewees to tell the UK what we should expect from Brexit, and keen to play up the latest approach of

some senior Germans that it is such a pity the UK is leaving so they should now respond more positively to Mr Cameron's requests for renegotiation! I find it bizarre that some intelligent Germans seem to think that maybe a concession or two on freedom of movement, and some opt out or emergency brake on benefit rules will mean the UK then changes its mind and stays in. They had their chance to keep us in by being positive about the Cameron renegotiation. Many of us thought Mr Cameron asked for too little, and clearly got a lot less even than he dared ask for. Offering more of the too little he wanted is not going to change anything. The BBC seemed pleased that maybe there will be an offer of tariff free trade after all, as if that was some surprise. Of course Germany wants tariff free trade in goods, given her huge surplus. Whether the EU as a whole can make a sensible offer on trade remains to be seen. Germany should work on the Commission. The BBC was also keen to highlight those Germans who say that the Transition period cannot be taken for granted as they sought to help Germany squeeze more concessions from the UK to secure a Transition many of us do not want.

It was predictable to hear the Germans say that in the case of us leaving the customs union and single market, as we have said we will do, there was scope to keep us in after all despite early EU rhetoric that of course you cannot be in them if you are out of the EU. Again that boat has sailed. Leave voters voted in the knowledge we would be leaving the single market and customs union, and the EU confirmed the logic of that in all their comments. It was also amusing to learn that maybe passports should be available for financial services, as of course German companies would like them into London, when the UK had ruled them out! It just goes to show that if the UK says No firmly on items Germany is quite keen to make an offer we might still refuse.