

## UNITING for PEACE

*"Towards an Ethical Foreign Policy for the United Kingdom"*

Rev. Brian Cooper

An extended version of a speech given at the UfP 2014 Spring Conference held at Wesley's Chapel, City of London March 29 2014 on : *A NEW MOMENTUM FOR PEACE: NO SYRIA INTERVENTION - WHAT NEXT?*

**HISTORIC CONTEXT:** On August 29 2013 the UK Parliament voted to reject any UK involvement in military action against the Assad regime in Syria, then being considered by President Obama. David Cameron declared to the Commons: "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." The vote certainly reflected public war-weariness post-Iraq/Afghanistan, and unwillingness to back more 'interventions' - but does it mark a fundamental rejection of war in the foreseeable future? Ex-Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt MP said in December 2013 UK policy was now confused: "There is now a question mark about what Parliament will authorise military support for. There is Gibraltar and Falklands - I think we can assume those. I am not sure we can assume anything else." [*The Guardian, 31.12.2013*]. Significantly, in the Crimea crisis, Defence Secretary Philip Hammond MP categorically ruled out any military action [instead of leaving the matter deliberately uncertain, a regular tactic in earlier crises.]

**The Peace Movement must certainly resist any move to reverse or dilute the August 2013 vote. Furthermore, it should see it, together with UK military withdrawal from Afghanistan, as a *potential historic turning-point for UK foreign policy, away from military interventionism and power-projection, and towards a fundamentally ethically-driven international stance.***

### **ETHICAL DYNAMICS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:**

Years ago I learned from Rev. Simon Phipps, late Bishop of Lincoln and ex-Coventry Cathedral Industrial Chaplain, that applying the Christian dynamic of

reconciliation in industrial relations required seeing a problem from the other side, and 'taking the legitimate interests of the other side absolutely seriously'. This can equally be applied in international affairs. Not doing so often leads to crises. The current **US/EU-Russia Crisis over Ukraine/Crimea** is an example. Since the end of the Cold War, the West has consistently sought to bolster its own security at the expense of Russia's security. Security assurances given to Russia by Pres. George Bush Snr. that **NATO** would not expand to Russia's borders were broken by his successors: NATO did just that. There were even US pressures to bring Georgia into NATO. Putin backed US post 9/11 but got nothing in return; he felt his friendship overtures rejected. Ex-BBC Moscow Correspondent Angus Roxburgh correctly wrote: "The West made a major mistake believing it could build its own security at the expense of Russia's. It created a situation in which Moscow feels not just marginalised but threatened." [*Daily Telegraph*].

**EU expansionism**, disregarding Russia's historic sphere, is also deemed threatening by Russia. At pre-coup Munich Security Conference, EU Council President Herman van Rompuy declared: "Ukraine's future belongs with the EU", ignoring its 1000-year old ties with Russia [Orthodox Christian Russia began with the Baptism of Prince St. Vladimir of Kiev in 985] and Russia's legitimate security interests. EU, urged by US which in 2008 had promised Ukraine 'eventual NATO membership', pushed Russia's exclusion. When Putin outbid EU with huge economic aid the pro-EU, pro-US coup in Ukraine took place. Putin at once saw the anti-Russian government in Kiev as a threat to its strategic base in Crimea, and acted swiftly to secure it - and with local popular mandate. Neither Kiev coup nor Crimea take-over were legal, but resulted from failure to seek reconciliation of competing interests. [*The post-conference crisis in eastern Ukraine is likewise caused by Kiev's refusal to take seriously the aspirations of ethnic Russians there. Sir Christopher Meyer, former UK Ambassador to US, suggested a 'Finland' status for Ukraine, ie. a bridge country between Russia and the West, not committed to either, as a feasible solution.*]

The Christian principle of **repentance** - recognition of past wrongs and readiness not to repeat them - can also be relevant in international relations. For example, recognition by the West of such betrayals towards Russia and its responsibility for

deteriorating relations, and recognition by Russia that its actions cause anxiety in the West, would improve the atmosphere leading to more positive relations. Instead of the West excluding Russia from international forums, it should be invited to work with other European countries to co-create, within UN, a new pan-European peace and security framework to guarantee the legitimate security interests of all states. Such a settlement would finally realise Gorbachev's vision of a 'common European home'.

International relations would greatly benefit from an **absence of hypocrisy**. US has no moral grounds for condemning Russian interventions, when US' own record of interventionism is second to none. When one considers recent US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, or recalls its 20th-century record of many interventions in Latin America, Vietnam, etc. its lecturing of Russia is bizarre hypocrisy. Global relations would benefit from less hypocrisy and more truth-telling!

### **PRIORITIES for UK FOREIGN POLICY**

Applying ethical and faith-derived principles to UK foreign policy requires **UK should abandon any policies and postures which threaten or potentially threaten other states:**

: **Nuclear Weapons:** A non-threatening policy necessarily requires giving up nuclear deterrence. This could be done even while UK possesses nuclear weapons - by ceasing at-sea patrols, laying up the Trident submarines, and mothballing the warheads. An immediate commitment to multi-lateral nuclear disarmament negotiations under the NPT Treaty, and rejection of Trident renewal, would also be required.

: **Arms Trade:** Government promotion of the arms trade is ethically unacceptable, internationally de-stabilising and ultimately counter-productive, as weapons exported can always eventually fall into the hands of regimes or groups inimical to world peace. Reducing and eventually abolishing UK arms trade is an essential component of an ethical foreign policy.

: **Rejection of Interventionism:** Recent UK interventions, often without UN

authority or going beyond it [eg.Libya]have been unacceptable to much of the international community.Whether 'liberal' or not, this feature of UK policy should be consigned to the past, as should all military adventurism, none of which could be deemed ethical.

Rejecting such negatives,UK should develop a **new foreign policy, emphasising a 'soft power'**, non-confrontational and globally co-operative approach. Such would give primacy to:

: **International Aid:** Here the Coalition has a positive record,to be supported.Priority should be given to backing grassroots self-help development projects, rather than aid to governments.

: **Conflict Resolution:** UK diplomacy should be available for mediation in disputes prior to their becoming dangerous or violent, as well as for post-conflict peace negotiations. UK's role should always be closely co-ordinated with relevant UN agencies.

: **Priority to the UN:** The UN is weakened by states only using it when it suits their interests, rather than giving it prime place in their international policies. If UK did the latter, it would set an example for other states to follow, and significantly boost the UN's standing and authority. UK would further strengthen UN and improve its own moral standing in the world by stating categorically it would only ever undertake military action under the UN flag,and would train its forces for UN peace-keeping roles. Further,UK would boost its soft power role by increasing its commitment to UN humanitarian agencies eg. UNICEF.

: **People-to-people Peacemaking:** Peace between the nations of the world is not only created by governments and international institutions: ordinary citizens have a vital role. People-to-people peace-making and peace-building, expressed post-1945 by links between British cities and German ones, and town-twinning generally, contributed much to peace in Europe, and by links with East European and Soviet ones, to 'grassroots detente' in the Cold War era. This dimension of peace work needs reviving for our time.

: **The Ultimate Ethics Test:** according to the Bible [Gospel of Matthew 26.

31-46], the nations of the world are judged by whether or not they cared for the poor. So I would suggest that when a UK international policy is advocated or put into effect, it should always be judged by this ethics test: does it help to feed the millions who go hungry every day? Does it help those who are ill-housed, lack medical care, have no school, are jobless? With such scrutiny, UK could develop a truly ethical foreign policy.

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