

## HOUSE OF LORDS DEBATE ON UKRAINE – 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

My Lords, the noble Baroness has made a very eloquent speech about the tragedies and the obscene abuses of the laws of war, such that we have not seen for decades. It was impressive that that was supported so strongly by the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Stirrup. For a military leader to spend as much time as he did on that grotesque situation and the necessity to do something about it was very important.

However, we must not be complacent about the mechanisms in front of us. It is easy to look back on the former Yugoslavia and see the number of people serving in prison—some criminals are in British prisons at this moment—but we had a specific international criminal court to deal with crimes in Yugoslavia, set up by agreement of the Security Council. We have no chance whatever of getting a similar legal structure to deal with the crimes of this war. We should be realistic about that, but we should try our hardest to establish some new mechanism.

We should never forget that we are talking about the second invasion of Ukraine. There was a first invasion, in relation to which we performed lamentably. Once again, we must recognise that appeasement never works. Now that we face this situation, we in Europe must not equivocate about it—and I am proud of how the British Government have responded. However, the facts are that, without President Biden's leadership and the massive contribution that has been made, NATO would not have been able to do what it has done. The Secretary-General of NATO, Stoltenberg, has done a sterling job, as have many others. We have, quite rightly, transformed a defensive alliance, saying that, when a friendly country—not a member of NATO—is attacked, we have the right to supply it with arms to defend itself. I think I am right in saying that we have never done that before in NATO. This is an important new power that we have taken, and it is wholly legitimate.

How have we done in terms of the rest of the world? The best definition of what we must achieve was provided in July by the G7 leaders of Britain, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and the United States. In their strong statement, they affirmed their

“unwavering commitment to the strategic objective of a free, independent, democratic, and sovereign Ukraine ... capable of defending itself and deterring future aggression”.

I stress those last words. That is the task in front of us.

The Russian military is now rallying, as it so often does and as it did in the Second World War, as we all remember. It is rallying with the support of China and, most recently, of North Korea, and it also has Iran. That is a formidable combination; do not let any of us underestimate how it can be, and is being, mobilised.

One thing needs to be said about China. It is pretty clear that it has made President Putin recognise that he will not be able to resort to tactical nuclear weapons in this war. I profoundly hope that this decision is not changed in any way by China and that it stems from a profound belief that there can be no nuclear war. In favour of that being the right interpretation of China, at least it can be said that it is spending substantial sums of money on its own conventional forces. Of course, it has the capacity to use nuclear weapons too. Let us hope that China, this new power—it is a new power, and it is almost right to call it a superpower—will use its power in an intelligent way. When we debate China on many other aspects of this, we should show a little bit more realism about what China is and what it could become.

With elections coming in the United States, I believe that it is of paramount importance that the average American voter believes that Europe has responded fully and totally and made a commitment through NATO that is almost as much as we possibly can. I do not think that we are there yet, but I attach great importance to it. The American military has always been understanding about Europe's contribution. It wanted more from Europe and it wanted more money, but it believes that we, and some of the key countries, such as France and others, have been ready. Germany has never responded sufficiently in the eyes of an American looking at its contribution. I pay tribute to Chancellor Scholz, in very difficult circumstances, because that has changed remarkably. It is vital that that change continues and is backed by real financial resources and real weapons, commitment and numbers of German military ready to fight.

One other thing that is most important when we look at China is that it understands that this country was deeply affronted when President Xi tore up the treaty over Hong Kong signed by Deng Xiaoping and Margaret Thatcher. It was a massive blow to international authority and devastating that a country emerging as a great country and a great superpower should have acted in that way.

What else can be done in the short term? Britain must step up its own commitment. A lot of it will come not so much in money, though it will eventually have to be paid for, but in taking very valuable weaponry—first, in the first few weeks, in dealing with tanks, and now more recently with the readiness to supply the long-range Storm Shadow missiles, which have

been very effective. Each and every member of NATO, particularly the European members, will be watched very carefully, because the debate inside the United States is where this issue is going to be resolved. It is no good trying to escape it. We have to make sure that opinion is shifted in favour of what is happening in the response to Russia, China, North Korea and Iran.

This is a huge commitment, which cannot be undertaken by the United States, even with all its power, on its own. It is a fact that a substantial number of American people do not yet understand the challenge and the threat. It is not getting through to decent, average United States people that there will have to be a major response. The American military must go out and campaign that Europe is responding. There are too many people in America who believe that we have not paid our fair whack for defence in NATO, and they are right. It is important that that understanding is changed; if it is not changed, we run a serious risk of a response from the United States that will not be sufficient to deal with the global challenges that it faces.

I will say this: I am very pleased that this country has understood that one way of explaining to the American people that we are paying our full whack and responding is through our having made an adjustment—not a major one, but a small contribution. We have, in effect, gone back east of Suez and accepted that there is a threat and a challenge in the Pacific. The United States should not be facing that purely and simply by itself. It will not be a very large commitment, but the impact of seeing a British aircraft carrier in Pacific waters, supported by escort vessels from the United States, Australia and New Zealand, matters to American public opinion. They then feel that we understand their security concerns. Many of them are more concerned about China than about what is happening in Ukraine. That is the reality—look at the opinion polls in the United States. We are still important movers of opinion.

I must declare an interest in that I am married to an American, but it has given me an understanding over many years of my life that America can do the right thing. There is inherently in the American people a capacity to do the right thing; they have done it in two world wars—though both times a little too late. This will predominantly be their war. We are helping them, and will help them right across the globe, where the horrors of the actions that we have seen in Ukraine will undoubtedly be reproduced. It is in that sense that we in this House see, as someone has already mentioned, that the cross-party nature of the contribution is very real.

I am glad that the noble Lord, Lord Harrington, spoke about what has been done for refugees and the refugee movement. I have seen in Wiltshire—

around our house and among our friends, and among anybody who has ever helped the refugees, right across the classes, trades and skills—an amazing response to try to help Ukrainian refugees. The spirit is there in this country, the spirit is growing in Europe, and the spirit will come in the United States. Until it does, we face formidable adversaries, and we should not for any moment underestimate them.