

The Great War: Listening to the Past; Talking to the Future

One hundred years after World War One, what is its legacy for the UK and how does it shape the nation today?



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Debate transcript

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Introduction

The Lord Speaker (Baroness D'Souza):

Good afternoon, and a warm welcome to you all. It is wonderful to see you here in a very crowded Chamber. I am Baroness D'Souza, the Lord Speaker, and I am presiding over the debate, as I do normally when we hold debates in this House. The discussions we are going to have today are extremely important, as I am sure all of you realise, in that we will be talking about defence, remembrance and, of course, the legacy of the Great War and other conflicts.

This is the seventh debate to be held in the Chamber with guests who are not Members of this House. For hundreds of years, no one was allowed to sit in this House unless they were Peers. Most of you are not Peers, so we are very delighted to see you here today. I am doubly pleased that we have a mix of young cadets and venerable veterans with us today. This is only the second time that we have held an intergenerational debate, so again we are making history. I hope you agree that it is both valuable and wonderful to hear views from across the age range. We have 146 cadets from the Army, Sea and Air Forces as well as from the Combined Cadet Forces and 47 veterans. The veterans have been invited by our partner for this event, the Royal British Legion, and no doubt they will draw on and share their vast and diverse experience. Other partners I should mention are the English Speaking Union, which has devised and delivered this debate model and, of course, the Ministry of Defence, which was responsible for liaising between the different cadet forces and co-ordinating the cadet participants. Our thanks go to them both.

This is a timely debate as it is being held shortly after Remembrance Day, which as you all know was on 11 November, and before the new year of 2014, when we will commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. The debate is being televised and will be broadcast both on BBC Parliament and on the House of Lords website. Before we move on to the details of how we will proceed today, I want to take a moment to acknowledge with pride all those who gave their lives in the Great War and in subsequent wars and conflicts, to whom we owe a great debt. So many left this House between 1914 and 1918 never to return, and we salute them on plaques in the Royal Gallery and in Westminster Hall. Their sacrifice is an ever-present reminder of the demands we put on those who choose to serve their country in the Armed Forces.

I imagine that you have been given lots of briefing, but I will briefly outline how we will proceed. We are going to open with six main speeches of three minutes each on the question: 100 years after World War One, what is the legacy for the United Kingdom, and does it shape the nation today? Three different perspectives will be expressed. The first is: The UK is a more globally responsible nation in the wake of the First World War. The second is: Society is more aware of the impact of war. The third perspective is: The UK has not learned from its experience. I hope that you will all encourage our opening speakers because it can be a bit nerve-wracking, so let us give them lots of encouragement. I will then open the debate to the floor. We have some prepared contributions and I will call upon those people, but at that point anyone will be able to put up their hand. Please state who you are and which is your cadet force, and you will be able to put your point of view. Those contributions will have to be very brief because we want to get as many people as we can to participate in the debate. At 16:41 we will have closing speeches, which again will be of a maximum of three minutes each.

I will now hand over to David Beamish, the Clerk of the Parliaments, who is sitting opposite me in his wig and gown. He will say a few words about his role in the Chamber today.

The Clerk of the Parliaments (David Beamish):

Thank you very much, Lord Speaker. I am delighted to be here in the place where I usually sit when the House of Lords is sitting and playing something like my usual role, about which I shall say a bit more in a minute. I very much enjoyed our first intergenerational debate which was held here a year ago, but I gather that one or two people asked, “Who is the strangely dressed person sitting at the Table?” It was thought that this year it would be good for me to give a few words of explanation about my role. Looking around the Chamber today, the good thing is that I do not feel at all strangely dressed. Indeed, I feel quite at home among all the interesting uniforms, especially those of the Pensioners from the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, which are brightening the Chamber today. My office, which might be described elsewhere as the secretary-general or chief executive of the House of Lords, goes back over 700 years, and I guess that the dress we wear got fossilised around 300 years ago. We are still wearing what might have been more commonplace then. I have an opposite number at the other end of the building who is known as the Clerk of the House of Commons, who this year is celebrating the 650th anniversary of his office – but I go back a bit further.

I have the honour and responsibility of leading a team of around 500 staff who support the House and enable it smoothly to perform its crucial role as the Second Chamber of the United Kingdom Parliament. We have a very diverse range of staff. Some work closely with what goes on in the Chamber, and you have seen some of them today. They include the Doorkeepers and the Yeoman Usher, Brigadier Neil Baverstock, who briefed you at the beginning. Some of my colleagues provide the secretariat for the committees, which also do important work in committee rooms along by the river. Some work in the Table Office where business due to take place in the House is presented or the Legislation Office where Bills are processed and amendments tabled.

A whole lot more work is done a little further way: the catering staff who served you your lunch earlier; the staff of the Library who not only provide newspapers, magazines and reference books, but also prepare briefing notes on business before the House and provide a research service for Members; the Attendants who make rooms available to Members and look after their offices and the Housekeepers who clean the offices. At the third level of the support services we have a finance department. The House of Lords costs around £100 million a year overall, which compared with other Parliaments we like to think is quite good value, but it is quite a lot of money for which I am in principle responsible. The Human Resources Department looks after the arrangements for all the staff. The Parliamentary Archives looks after the records of both Houses of Parliament, most of which are stored in the Victoria Tower. Last on my list but by no means last is the Information Office, which deals with our relationship with the outside world by briefing the press and providing information materials. One that is relevant today is a History of the House of Lords showing that the layout of this Chamber was much the same hundreds of years ago. We have an outreach programme whereby we try to tell the world about what we are doing, in particular young people in schools. Finally, I mention the key people from the House of Lords side who are behind the event today, and you will have seen some of them in the Royal Gallery and elsewhere earlier.

I have not covered everything that is done to support the House because some work is done jointly between the two Houses. We have a joint ICT service, and security is provided for us by the Metropolitan Police. The building is maintained by staff who are employed by the House of Commons, but they support the building as a whole and we pay a share. The visitor assistants who showed you around earlier are another example of the arrangements that are governed jointly.

In addition to my managerial role, I am here when the House sits – not all the time because I share that duty with my colleagues. At the beginning of each Sitting I call the business by standing up and announcing the name of the Lord who is asking a Question or calling an item of business. I am not quite doing that today, but there is something I am going to be doing, and I shall say a word about it. Many debates are timed, and indeed I am timing myself. You can see that I have been speaking for four minutes. I am supposed to speak for five minutes so I shall wind up quite shortly. If a Member reaches the time limit, we do not actually stop them talking, but if they go on much longer it is likely that someone, possibly a Member of the Government from the Dispatch Box to my left, will intervene. I am going to be a little more pushy today so as to make sure that you know when you have had your time, which is three minutes for the main speakers, 75 seconds for the chosen interveners and 90 seconds for the impromptu speakers. When your time is up I shall ring my little bell. We do not have it for a normal Sitting, but it will indicate that it is time for you to wind up. I am afraid that I have an advantage over you because the clocks that you can see show only whole minutes, but I have a clock that shows the seconds as well.

My general role is to give advice to Members in a whisper and to see that things go smoothly. Despite our rather ancient set-up, we have a laptop computer so that we can communicate with people outside. Although this debate will be pretty close to a normal one, the important exception is that the Lord Speaker will call on people to speak. That is the most practical way of conducting a debate like this. In our real-life debates the Lord Speaker will put the Question and the debate flows from there. Sometimes it flows smoothly because for most debates we have a pre-planned list, but sometimes it does not. Question Time can be interesting when many Lords want to speak. However, I have overrun my time so I will close by saying how much I am looking forward to this debate – and off we go.

The Lord Speaker (Baroness D'Souza):

Thank you very much, Clerk of the Parliaments. At the end of the debate and all the interventions, when we will have expressed ourselves as well as we can, there will be a vote, but I shall talk about the procedure when we reach that point. I shall now call the speakers who are to open the debate.

Opening speeches

Matthew Rodrick (Air Cadets):

Good afternoon, Lord Speaker, ladies and gentlemen, fellow cadets, veterans and esteemed guests. As we are all aware, I am here today to convince you that the United Kingdom has come a long way due to the legacy and impact of the Great War, and that because of it we are a much more globally responsible nation. This is the viewpoint and the argument that I stand for today. The two points I am going to make will utterly persuade you into acknowledging the argument that we are more responsible due to the Great War. First, British foreign policy and attitudes to other nations around the world have changed due to the war and its legacy and, secondly, we have shown over the last century that we are a more globally responsible and active country due to the role we played as a guide and a power in the war.

For my first point I shall take us back briefly to Britain's foreign policy before World War One. Before the war, we had colonies and were heavily involved militarily with our own assets, but neither cared for nor had any time for the affairs of other nations in Europe that did not directly affect the United Kingdom. After the war, though, that changed as the Government and the nation had seen the dangerous consequences of ignorance. This is an irrefutable, bare-boned fact that shows how we did become more globally aware directly because of the war.

My second point shows how, over the last century, we have become a more globally responsible and active nation due to the role we played as a guide and power in the war. For this point I look towards the League of Nations, the United Nations and the European Union. In all three of these incredibly powerful and authoritative unions, the UK has been a powerful voice which has had a say and an input into many world-changing decisions. Why is that? We were a small nation which, after the war, lost control of its colonies and was in massive debt. Why should we have been such a major player in these decisions? The answer is this: it is because of the legacy that the war left – the legacy of us, standing up and fighting back the Kaiser's army, the legacy that one small island on the edge of Europe had the power to change the world. This legacy was left and, because of it, we became a much more globally responsible nation.

To conclude, the United Kingdom is a small nation with a lot of power, responsibility and authority. We were great in the war: responsible and aware, and we left a legacy that has echoed throughout the last century. We stood up for those who needed it and we are a guiding nation in the world today. So, yes, we are indisputably a more globally responsible nation. We are the United Kingdom, small yet mighty, with responsibilities and duties to the world that we have kept with us constantly since the Great War. Thank you.

Omar Uwais (Combined Cadet Forces):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, we strongly believe that the United Kingdom is undoubtedly more aware of the impacts of war since the First World War. There are three main examples that we feel emphasise this opinion. These are, first, the improved understanding and treatment of combat stress; secondly, the change in public opinion about war; and, thirdly, a less restricted media.

It is undeniable that the United Kingdom has become much more aware of combat stress since World War One. It is estimated that by 1916, over 40% of the casualties in the fighting zones were victims of shell shock. However, even with such a high number of cases, there was a huge lack of understanding of the condition, and victims were often charged with desertion or cowardice. Sufferers often faced harsh treatment such as solitary confinement. Today, post-traumatic stress disorder is recognised as a severe condition and there are dozens of

successful charities helping to treat combat stress. There are far more effective treatments and medications. In general, there has been a huge growth in the charitable sector for serving members of the Armed Forces and for veterans which demonstrates the enhanced awareness of and support for previously ignored injuries such as combat stress.

The second example of how the United Kingdom is more socially aware of the impact of war is a general public awareness of the consequences of combat. In the early stages of World War One, millions of citizens embraced the war, expecting it to end soon. Before, many conflicts had been fought by soldiers who were far from home, but the Great War opened up a new front of warfare for Britain: the Home Front. Civilians, including for the first time huge numbers of women, were now crucially involved in the war effort by aiding their fellow countrymen who were fighting on the front line. Civilians were given a disturbing glimpse of what war was like, and it changed everyone's opinion to the view that war, although at times necessary, is a destructive waste of life that should be avoided at all costs. This opinion has been reflected in vast protests across the country against military action in situations such as the invasion of Iraq and the intervention in Afghanistan.

Last of all, it is irrefutable that the media has made us more socially aware of the impact of war. The Ministry of Information was established during the First World War, and among other tasks it was responsible for censoring insufficiently patriotic articles in the press. Evidently, this led to a lack of information reaching the Home Front. Today, we have information that is readily available in many other forms than just newspapers, word of mouth and black-and-white films in cinemas. What is more, even negative articles concerning our military action are accessible. This, we believe, has led to us having a broader and deeper understanding of the effects of war. For these reasons as well as many others, our team firmly believes that the United Kingdom is more socially aware of the impact of war since the First World War. Thank you.

Jonathan Beeney (Sea Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, ladies and gentlemen, in the 100 years that have passed since the Great War, we as a nation have not addressed the problems that we encountered. The reason we gave for entering World War One was to help defend Belgium's neutrality. Germany had marched upon Belgium and it was our job to help. I do not suggest that this was not a fair cause or that we should not have done so and we can see that in conflicts since, our aims have been very similar – Afghanistan, for example. Yet behind these motives of peace and protection lies another more political angle. America invaded Iraq, and we followed. America invaded Afghanistan, and we followed. I ask you, how can a country claim to have learned anything from previous conflict if it still enters into war so easily?

Our Armed Forces are second to none. Their training is the best in the world and we are ready to face any threat, wherever it may come from. This, while undeniably applaudable, must be questioned. Is it so right that we are prepared for conflict? Must we always be in a state of readiness? If we, or any other country for that matter, had learned from previous experience, then we would be avoiding war at all costs. Such militarisation is no longer appropriate for the world we face today.

We must now look at the aftermath of war. In the First World War, we used 2.5 million soldiers from outside the United Kingdom. Without those troops, we would not have had the presence we required and would probably have lost the war. We owe our lives to every soldier who fought on our side, not just those from the United Kingdom, and yet we hear stories of foreign soldiers who had fought in conflicts since being threatened with deportation – after they have completed many years of service. This is another example of our country's inability to consider the effects of war. We focus solely on the preparation for war and conduct during it.

Our modern society has not endured war on the same scale as World War One. During the Great War, our country banded together showed solidarity in the face of adversity. Now we see that the brunt of conflicts lies solely upon the shoulders of soldiers and their families, which is a tiny percentage of the population. Those brave soldiers, brave wives, brave husbands, brave parents and children – they are the brave few who carry the weight of the Government’s decisions upon their shoulders and are largely forgotten by the state which put them there, and by the rest of society who would rather feign ignorance than face the real consequences of war. The legacy of World War One is that our society is largely desensitised to losses in war and it has shaped our nation in that we are constantly preparing for conflict. Our country has learned nothing from previous conflict.

Elizabeth Guest (Air Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, as my team-mate has already said, we are here to show you the facts behind the correct view that the UK is a more globally responsible nation due to the legacy created by the Great War. You have heard how British foreign policy changes, Britain’s role as a guide and power in the war, and Britain’s influence as a role model have created this view of our Great Britain, but I shall convince you with two further points: first, how the UK’s delivery of humanitarian assistance has changed due to the legacy created by the Great War; and secondly, how this legacy has shaped how the UK displays its global responsibility.

Now to my first point: that the UK’s use of humanitarian assistance has changed due to the legacy created by the Great War. As we all know, our small island played a huge role throughout the First World War, and because of that the UK continues to play a large part in global development. An obvious parallel can be drawn between the role that the UK played in ending the war and the eternal suffering and destruction caused by that conflict, and the role of the UK ever since – a country determined to eradicate suffering and intent on reducing poverty. Our country is striving for the greater good. This is shown by the amount of financial aid that the UK provides to less developed countries. In 2011, the UK provided \$13.7 billion in assistance, making it the third largest donor of official global assistance in that year. Surely our role in ending the misery of the Great War is a clear link to the UK’s fight to end deprivation in the modern world.

Secondly, I will explain how this legacy has shaped how the UK displays its global responsibility. Our knowledge of the atrocities of the Great War has urged us to strive to prevent such horrors in the future. Due to this, the UK now takes steps to prevent and expose global crises caused unnecessarily by foreign powers. An example of this is the part that the British Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are currently playing in the negotiations on the Iran nuclear deal. The British Government is striving to lessen the threat of the Iranian nuclear programme, showing how in order to prevent a global disaster such as the Great War, our nation is working to prevent acts that would threaten the stability of every country in the world. This current example, as well as the work done by the UK in the past, is definite evidence of the legacy of the Great War having a significant impact on the UK’s global responsibility.

Overall, it is clear that I and my teammate have presented and are supporting the correct view. These factors all show how the legacy of the Great War has shaped our nation, causing it to be more globally responsible. In conclusion, I would like to remind you of the wise words of a former Prime Minister that I believe truly sum up the United Kingdom view of its responsibility at the end of the Great War: “This war, with all its tragedies of suffering and sacrifice, is purifying and cleansing the atmosphere. We can neither go back to the past, nor rest in the present; but out of the lessons and the experience of both we may build up a worthier fabric for the future of humanity.”

Coco Collard (Combined Cadet Forces):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I will be continuing the case for the defence of the view that society is more aware of the impact of war. Omar has discussed the change in the view of the general public and the press, and I will look at the way that the Government, elected to represent the views of society, has changed its approach to war since 1914. In the years leading up to the Great War, Britain was the dominant international power, holding a vast empire. Colonies were won through war, and a good old-fashioned war always provided the Government with a wave of patriotic support. The Great War would be no different: it would be over by Christmas. What were a few soldiers' lives in comparison to the greater good? Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori; it is sweet to die for your country – or is it?

The social impacts of the Great War on the general public led to the consensus that the deliberate launching of war could no longer be justified, which forced the Government to consider alternatives to waging war in the instance of international disagreement. We see this in the formation of the League of Nations in 1919, and in the 1930s, when Britain adopted a policy of appeasement and attempts at diplomacy in the face of German expansion. War had now been given a last resort status. The impacts of the Second World War cemented diplomacy as an effective tool. As Churchill famously stated, to jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war. Would a politician such as Churchill promote this perspective had the losses of the First World War not been so great?

The reluctance to go to war due to the impacts of World War One also manifests itself in the way that war is conducted. As Omar discussed, war is now less about the cause and more about the rights of those fighting. Due to greater freedom of the press and the ease of communication made available by the internet, we now have access to the blogs and videologs of those in combat, information leaked by whistleblowers, and a range of opinion other than mindless patriotism. This transparency makes it harder for the Government to justify going to war, as following of the interests of the public is essential. For instance, we saw this in a recent debate in this very Parliament on whether to support the anti-Assad fighters in Syria. There was a resounding reluctance to engage without setting a clear timeline and objective for withdrawal. These transparent requirements would certainly not have been necessary when, in 1914, similar discussions were held regarding joining World War One.

It is difficult to comprehend that in the First World War, the British Army executed over 300 of its own men. This punishment was for crimes such as cowardice, or what could now be medically described as post-traumatic stress disorder. That startling abuse of human rights was a stark contrast to modern attitudes to combatants when going to war. For example, soldiers can now appeal to the European Court of Justice over insufficient body armour. The focus of war has undoubtedly shifted, with it being necessary for the Government to prioritise, or at least place equal importance on, the rights of the combatants over the objective of the war. This is as a direct result of the horrors of the First World War and accurately reflects a changing societal viewpoint over the last century. Thank you.

David McEntire (Sea Cadets):

from its experiences in how to adapt to and deal with the aftermath of conflict. My primary point is that the psychological treatment and aftercare of veterans has not yet developed. Secondly, we have only just started to comprehend how to rebuild areas affected by conflict. Although the UK has learned how to medically treat physically injured personnel, we have yet to learn how to support those who require psychological treatment. Consequently, large numbers suffer from psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

Between 2012 and 2013, more servicemen and veterans committed suicide than were killed in action. Offending rates for ex-service personnel are also high, as are the numbers living rough or in hostels. This highlights the need for improved support and rehabilitation of personnel. The military puts the soldier into them but does not take it out. Anyone who is injured in the line of duty deserves the very best support. Although it is Governments that send our service personnel to war, it is often charities that are forced to pick up the pieces afterwards. An example of this lack of support was the 2009 Gurkha citizenship crisis, when many Gurkhas were threatened with deportation. Even today, a soldier from Fiji who had served nine years was recently held for deportation, until the intervention of the Prime Minister. This proves that our Government has yet to learn how to properly treat and care for our veterans.

My second point concerns how we are only just starting to comprehend the need to help with the rebuilding of areas affected by conflict. The UK has a stated aim to support fragile states emerging from conflict. As demonstrated by Iraq, recovery has not been easy, with an initial descent into violence and ongoing problems. Lord Speaker, we believe that we ourselves and other western nations have often been responsible for, or not considered, the consequences of our actions. Without our support and that of other nations, fragile states can fail. If they fail, that leaves a void which can be filled by extremism and terrorism that causes many problems for ourselves and those states' future.

The UK Stabilisation Unit reported that a critical risk for stabilisation is trying to re-establish governance across a country with a complex history and politics within a hurried timeframe. It can be said that if we do not fully understand an area or a country, and we do not know how to rebuild it, we should not enter. It can also be said that if we fully understood the politics and history of an area, our conflict with it might not occur. Thank you.

The Lord Speaker (Baroness D'Souza):

Thank you. The arguments from all sides have been skilful and sophisticated, and your delivery has been well nigh perfect, so congratulations to everyone. Let us now start the debate. As I have said, some people have pre-prepared points to make, but there must be others who may wish to intervene. Please put your hand up and I will call on you.

Floor speeches

Aleksander Stepanyan (Combined Cadet Forces):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, the UK is historically an international country, ever since the days of the Empire. The responsibility this entails has been ingrained deeply into the public and political consciousness of our time. The First World War was a war of atrocities, but also a war for peace. The foundations of the greatest peacekeeping organisations came as a direct consequence of the Great War. The League of Nations, which later developed into the United Nations, was created to make sure that history does not repeat itself, and Britain was at the helm, along with Russia and the United States. The promise of peace that the UK had pledged all those years ago is still being sustained today. We play a leading role in NATO, we are a part of the G6 and we are internationally renowned as a peacekeeping nation. The UK has sent peacekeeping forces to Cyprus and Sudan, as well as the British Peace Support Team in Kenya and Sierra Leone. As we look towards the future in a world that is becoming more integrated – more globalised – by the minute, we see a UK that is more sensitive and willing to help those who have been let down by their nation, and it is this responsibility that lies at the heart of Great Britain. Thank you.

Edward Woolgar (Army Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I would like to reflect briefly on the points put forward by the first team, who were talking about UK foreign policy. It was once said of Britain that she has not permanent friends, but permanent interests. Perhaps, therefore, the advocacy from the first team that Britain's foreign policy today is philanthropic and purely charitable actually is closely allied to our foreign interests across the world. Thank you.

Sam Hall (Sea Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, how many of you bought a poppy during the Remembrance period? Do we donate to make ourselves feel good, or just to get rid of our change? I believe that we support these charities because we are more aware than ever of conflict and the acts of bravery that our servicemen and women commit for us and for our country. How are we more aware of the impact of war? People are now more connected to the media, whether we read about it in the newspaper, view it on the internet or watch it on television. The impact of war has, and always will be, a major topic to be discussed. For example, we recently saw the devastating acts in Syria and Afghanistan. These are prime examples that society is aware of the impact of war. Furthermore, the development in news technology has had a major impact on our awareness of global affairs. One hundred years ago, it might have taken weeks or even months for us to become aware of such conflicts, but now, if a major event happens on the other side of the world, we can find out about it instantly. The more aware we are, the more we care. Thank you.

Oliver Howell (Army Cadets):

Fellow cadets, Lord Speaker and veterans, I would like to refer to some points made by team three in their beginning speech: how can a country that has learned from war be so ready to enter it? War is not something that anyone ever wants, but sometimes it must occur. In reference to Afghanistan, that was a war to take down the pro-terrorist Government in place at the time, and even the wars in Iraq were fought for the protection of Kuwait and the possibility of a direct threat to the UK, the US and other countries. Just because a country is prepared for war does not mean that it wants war. It does not mean that it has not learned from war. We know about the consequences of war and we know that we must never go to war with the joy of wanting it, but there are times when there is no alternative and that peace cannot be achieved through words. Thank you.

Avinesh Mocherla (Army Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I would like to put forward a contentious argument. What would have happened if Britain had not intervened in the Great War? Wide historical opinion would suggest that the First World War would not have been a world war at all, but a smaller conflict enclosed within the confines of Europe. In this view, British intervention in the Great War can be seen as unnecessary, unjustified and, indeed, a mistake. But since then, Britain seems to have entered a golden age of intervention, from Rwanda to Bosnia and Kosovo, to Iraq, and now in Afghanistan, this trend of intervention has not ceased. But what, for instance, would have happened if Britain had not intervened in Iraq? The answer is not as contentious as it was for the First World War. That is because I, like many other people, believe that it was also a mistake. In both of these cases there seems to be a familiar pattern in the decision to go to war. I would suggest that there is a lack of humility in our attitudes, a lack of humility in the face of the unknowable, and a lack of humility in our understanding that intervention is not the only solution to international conflict. Thank you.

Joseph Legg (Royal Navy Veteran):

Lord Speaker, cadets and fellow veterans, we are debating the legacy of the First World War at the moment, but an important conference will take place next year. The Foreign Secretary is leading an initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict. I would argue that because we have seen reports of this kind of event happening going back to the times of Waterloo and before that, this country has not learned the lessons of the legacy of the First World War, but we are slowly still learning them. Thank you.

Alex Hall (Sea Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans. The 2008 Haiti earthquake – £107 million; the Boxing Day Indonesian tsunami – £392 million; the 2013 Philippines typhoon – £44 million and still counting. This is money that British people have given in aid for natural disasters across the world just within the last decade. These figures are testimony to the fact that we are now a more globally responsible nation. Global responsibility could mean a number of things: a few bags of rice for an impoverished community in Africa, or perhaps a seismologist who would be able to predict and warn those in Haiti about future earthquakes. Whatever we do, we cannot deny that we are taking responsibility and helping to save thousands of lives. The British Red Cross, formed to support our own soldiers, especially in World War One, is now a global organisation helping to provide aid to communities plagued by disease, disaster and debt. We are no longer just supporting our own citizens, but people across the world as a more globally responsible nation. Thank you.

Oliver Grell (Army Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I would say that the immense casualties suffered in the Great War undoubtedly left a mark on the British national psyche. You need only to look at war poetry and art and the significance they still have today to know that, and I would assert that the impact of the Great War went far beyond individuals and shaped the core values of our nation. In the world of today we do not disregard our national interests; we are not passive and we are not isolationists, but we will never, never again charge into a war with the same cavalier attitude that was exhibited in the Great War. This responsibility and maturity is, to my mind, the most significant effect of the First World War on the United Kingdom and the most clear evidence that we have become a nation that is globally responsible because of it.

Samantha Newell (Army Cadets):

Good afternoon, Lord Speaker, veterans and cadets. I would like to begin to repeating our statement: society is more aware of the impacts of war. Surely we can agree with that. We have developed extensively since World War One, both socially and economically. In terms of war we publicise any notion and fully comprehend the effects. We are knowledgeable, strategic and considered. You could say that we have evolved. We are more aware. We do not strive to fight and kill for reasons of primeval instinct or our own agenda. We have educated conversations and our nation provides us with key insights. We are far from the dark, but it is admittedly difficult to evaluate and measure awareness because it comprises so many invisible factors – but we do not know of our wars and where our soldiers stand at present. We underestimate our awareness. In the news we learn of our soldiers and society widely acknowledges them. We send aid, we give to charities, we feel their pain every time we are reminded of their suffering, and we are very aware of the impacts of war. Rome was not built in a day, but one day's destruction can take years to mend. This is something we are very aware of. Thank you.

Peter Bache (Air Cadets):

I want to remind you that the opening question for this debate was the legacy of World War One and how it has changed the shape of the world today. Numerous points have been made to say how we have become more aware. Yes, that is obvious, but it is not due to World War One; it is just due to the general advances in technology and media. We have become more aware because of the advances of the internet and other things. Also, we have heard reference to the League of Nations. People have been saying that because of World War One, war like that has not been repeated. It is called World War One because we then had World War Two. The League of Nations was not effective and war was repeated. Therefore, how can we say that the legacy left by World War One has made a change? We then had World War Two. It does not make sense. We had another war and the League of Nations was ineffective. Thank you.

Andy Gregory (Royal Air Force Veteran):

Lord Speaker, fellow veterans and cadets. On addressing the British Legion in 1932, a noble Member of this House said: "Those girls and boys have got to learn from you, lest the lessons you learnt with such suffering be wasted." He might have been speaking about James Crozier, who enlisted in September 1914 when he was only 15 years old. In mid-February 1916, this teenager had wandered off, saying that he did not know what he was doing since he was in a daze and suffering pains throughout his body. Recognised today as shell shock or PTSD, the doctor then said that he was perfectly fit in mind and body. James was shot at dawn on 26 February 1916, aged 18, evidently to set an example. More recently, we had the case of Marine A in Afghanistan. What he did should not be pardoned, but other circumstances in the theatre of war must be considered. What do we really know about the character of someone who has spent tours in Northern Ireland, Iraq and six times in Afghanistan? What more do we know about PTSD and how it may affect, for example, our Reservists in the future? We should no longer need to set an example.

Jake Deeming (Sea Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I should like to take us back to something my friend said. We have not learned the lessons of World War One, but we are slowly learning them. I think he is right. What World War One taught us was the value of a human life, and from that, the world has changed around us. We have becoming more accepting of things. Just look at the people around you in this House today. A hundred years ago, this would have been impossible. Since World War One we have seen the emancipation of women, equal rights, and recently gay marriage was introduced in this country. You cannot say that World War One has not had a lasting effect because you can see it around you in your daily life. It changed people's views and has made people think about their actions. It made people think about the effects of war, and that is the most important lesson that World War One has taught us.

Ella Morris (Combined Cadet Forces):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans. Prior to the First World War, Great Britain did not exhibit a great deal of global responsibility, with enormous wealth being generated for our own benefit on the back of slavery, suppression and colonisation. Although we emerged successful from two world wars, this was only possible because of substantial help from allied nations. Coming so close to destruction forced the UK to reassess her global position. It was crucial to prevent the recurrence of such catastrophic events, which led to Britain's key role in pioneering peace-promoting organisations. These included the League of Nations, later the United Nations, and being one of three key signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Along similar lines, the UK joined the European Union, which promotes co-operation and union over the conflict that applied to the continent in the first half of the 20th century. Aware that economic dispute had been a contributor to war, the UK also set up organisations such as the International Monetary Fund to encourage post-war growth, as well as the World Trade Organisation to settle trade disagreements. We have been at the forefront of humanitarian establishments such as UNICEF and UNHCR, and our foreign aid spending as a percentage of gross national income exceeds that of any other G8 country. I feel that these displays of leadership and accountability would strongly indicate that the resounding legacy of the First World War has been to make the UK a more globally responsible nation. Thank you.

William Nicholson (Sea Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I believe that it is important to take into account that since World War One, we have come ahead by leaps and bounds in the fields of anaesthesia and politics; that is, votes for women. But it is important to take into account the views of group three, in that Britain is probably too easily influenced by other countries going into war and other conflicts. Thank you.

Amy Robinson (Army Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I believe that we have learned from war because, as humanitarians would, we do not follow people in other countries into battle because we want to fight; we want peace, and that is what we are fighting for. My friend said that we are learning slowly, and I agree with him. One example is the Poppy Appeal by the Royal British Legion. Every year, the money raised by the Poppy Appeal has increased more and more, and that is because, deserving as this nation is, it recognises the sacrifice and the loss that our people have made. The nation then makes a sacrifice by giving money in order to show its respects. Thank you.

Eloise Haynes (Sea Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, we must have progressed in some ways from World War One because once we used to glorify war and now we do not. That is some sort of improvement.

Jago Lynch (Air Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans. "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old", is a line that we have heard year after year on a day that is devoted to our fallen soldiers – devoted to their loss. We wear our poppies, keep the two-minute silence, and we remember. We are educated by our schools, the media and our families. We, the people – society – have a duty to their memories, their fight in order to keep our freedom; a duty to devotion in their honour. It should not be by sentiment or chore that we commemorate them; it should be because it is totally and completely essential that the fallen live, if not corporeally, then in our minds. To fall in battle should be to achieve immortality in the memories of the people you have fought for. It can remain a choice to remember, but it cannot be denied that their memory is necessary, not to be imposed but compulsory through self-willingness. Memory is compulsory

because every person in this Chamber is connected as everyone in society is connected. Why? Because we all know someone who has fought or fallen in battle, and this is why society is more aware of the impact of war. This is why, “Age shall not weary them.”

Rachel Ireland (Combined Cadet Forces):

Lord Speaker, veterans and fellow cadets, my point is that, yes, every nation is going to learn something from war; there is no way that you can walk away without learning something. But I personally believe that we did not learn a lot from World War One. As someone said earlier, World War Two then happened. As a nation we are moving very slowly, but we will get there. The fact is that Germany was essentially entirely responsible for World War Two. From the age of six, German children are taken to visit the sites of the Holocaust, including the concentration camps, and are educated. All the cities have stones to remember all the people who died in the Holocaust. The Germans have a better sense of history about it than we do, and they have more reason not to want to repeat it because it surrounds them every day. I think that we shove a lot under the carpet, and that needs to stop before it is too late. The fact is that other nations are progressing faster than we are, and we need to catch up. Thank you.

David Gargett (Army Veteran):

Lord Speaker, cadets and fellow veterans, the United Kingdom, in my opinion, has not learned the lessons of the First World War, and I would argue that the evidence to support that lies in the lost treasure of our nation. When I say “lost treasure”, I do not mean merely the billions of pounds that have been spent on conflict, but the hundreds of thousands of young people killed – wasted talent in all cases – since World War One. We have not learned the lesson and we need more diplomacy and less war. As someone once said, less war and more jaw. Thank you.

Mark Ryneheart (Army Veteran):

Lord Speaker, the United Kingdom’s Armed Forces Covenant 2011 is evidence that British society today is more aware of the impact of war than ever before. Citizens are more wary of having their families and communities endure the consequences of foreign wars. They know that the real cost of war is felt by families at home. One third of the men killed in the First World War were married. Their deaths created three million widows and some eight million orphans. Since 2007, some three thousand Armed Forces personnel have been treated for injuries stemming from recent campaigns, and the civilian casualties have run into the tens of thousands. These casualty figures are still too high, but they bear no comparison with the scale of the devastation of the First World War. Over the past 100 years, not only has the scale of war diminished, but the legal threshold for committing troops to combat has been raised much higher. For this reason, when the nation commits its Armed Forces to military campaigns today, it keeps its covenant with them and with their families because it knows the real cost of war all too well. Thank you.

Gethyn Long (Air Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I am here to speak to you about how Britain has not learned from its experience in World War One. Like most of us, I am led to believe that the actions taken in that war were the right ones. We fought the German empire in order to free the invaded nations from oppression and to restore self-determination. However, I want us all to look at this with a degree of introspection. Our nation went to war believing that we were fighting for freedom. When we think of World War One, British people have a habit of thinking that they completely hold the moral high ground. Is that not hypocritical when you consider the conduct of Britain’s own empire in other parts of the world? Over a million British people died in the name of freedom, yet following the events of World War One, we went on to become involved in several conflicts in order to try and keep control of countries within the British Empire. Let us think about that. Did we not just claim that we fought for freedom and

self-determination? Why, then, did we try to prevent – through the use of force, I might add – countries such as India and Kenya in the British Empire from achieving independence themselves? These are only a couple of examples of Britain’s involvement in repression. You would have thought that the experiences of World War One and World War Two would have taught us that everyone has the right to self-determination. Even today, Britain has overseas territories that are disputed by other nations – for example, the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar. Perhaps it is time that these remnants were offered full independence and self-determination from the UK in order to show the world that Britain has learned from its past mistakes.

Sophie Binks (Sea Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, someone spoke earlier about the Poppy Appeal. We collect quite a lot of money during that appeal, but maybe we could get more if people knew more about World War One. If we had changed socially since the Great War, more people would know about conflict and they would want to help and donate towards aiding the fallen and those who have been injured. Perhaps the reason we are not collecting as much as we could is because people do not know about it. Thank you.

Matthew Shannon (Army Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, since the Great War, Britain and her allies have been involved in many wars, from World War Two through to modern-day conflicts such as that in Afghanistan. During this time, the number of service men and women has changed from four million at the peak of the Great War down to 205,330 Regulars and 181,720 Reserves. Our country has learned a lot over the years, but not just from the one conflict. It has taken a hundred years to learn, and even now some people believe that we are fighting pointless wars. However, we as a nation have become more aware of what is going on, and our forces are taking a more active role around the world. In 2007, some 30,000 men and women were deployed for humanitarian aid and disaster relief. This is proof of our role around the globe. Those who made the ultimate sacrifice during the Great War left a long-standing legacy for the good of the country. Nowadays we are taking steps – small steps – to show how much that meant to us. Throughout the world, those steps may be slow, but we are getting there and showing our respect for those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Thank you.

Sasha Forrest (Air Cadets):

I would like to point out that the United Kingdom has learned. The wars we fight now are for peace and the protection of human rights. Would you not say that those are just and worthy causes? We fight for the independence of other people. Thank you very much.

Jeremiah Emmanuel (Army Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, a few weeks ago, we remembered those who have fallen in conflict for this country. A line that always rests with me after Remembrance services is this one: “We will remember them.” We will always remember the people who have fought in the past for our futures. Sometimes I think to myself, should not the line be, “We cannot forget them”? We cannot forget what those people did in war for our futures. I do not justify war and for myself I hate violence, but there is a time for everything. There is time for us today to sit in the House of Lords and debate the Great War. There is a time for peace and there is a time for war, and sometimes wars have to be fought so that the future for certain people is made all right. Thank you.

John Safrany (Air Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, cast your mind back nearly 100 years ago when Britain had a huge empire. That huge empire was the target of jealousy from countries such as Germany and is one of the main reasons for the occurrence of World War One. After the Great War,

the Treaty of Versailles was signed by many nations, and it crushed Germany. Huge sanctions were imposed and ridiculous demands were made which crushed that country beyond belief, and a few years later we ended up with World War Two. Bring your minds forward to today to our current foreign policy on Iran. We are crushing Iran and demanding that the Iranians should do things that we do not do ourselves – getting rid of plutonium and uranium research, which we have ourselves; getting rid of heavy water research plants, which we have ourselves. Why should we demand of other countries what we do not demand of ourselves? Why should we harm their economy and steal their money, which is lying in our bank accounts, saying, “No, you can’t”? This will lead to greater wars, as it did after World War One and as it did after World War Two. That is why we have not become a more globally responsible nation. Thank you.

Bryony Cox (Sea Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, almost 100 years ago, the first Pals’ Battalions were formed. Young men enlisted to fight a war that they believed would be over by Christmas. For many, it was an adventure, an opportunity to see the world with their friends. However, scores would never return, and it is for this reason that society is more aware of the impact of war. How could we not be more aware when the bodies of those young men – the same young men who joined up with such hope and optimism – lie in their thousands in the graveyards of Belgium and France? How could we not be more aware when we see the photographs of soldiers, their futures torn from them by a single piece of shrapnel, or hear stories of men drowning in the mud? How could we not be more aware when war memorials serve as a permanent reminder in villages, towns and cities across the United Kingdom; that is the true cost of war carved in stone. Last year, 40 million poppies proved that we are more aware, each one a symbol not only that we remember, but that we will never forget. Earlier this month, those who turned up in their thousands to pay their respects to the fallen proved that we now understand the sacrifice that so many made for our country. Today, we have proved that we are more aware of the impact of war. We have come here from every corner of the United Kingdom to listen to the past in the hope that we will never repeat it. Thank you.

Roger Smith (Army Veteran):

Lord Speaker, cadets and fellow veterans, I believe that we have learned from World War One and World War Two. As a young gentleman said just now, World War Two was a mistake caused by World War One. However, the British Government and the Armed Forces now go in in limited numbers to stop a war developing along the lines of World War One and World War Two. Thank you.

Bridget Donaldson (Air Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I put it to you that the UK has not learned from its experience in World War One. We are still at war. We are still at war because no country is willing to put down their arms first. We are still at war because we have not learned from our past experience. Mere years following the devastating and disastrous aftermath of the Great War, we plunged straight into the Second World War. We did this without any consideration of previous events. We did it for our own interests, and in doing so we ended up with a greater number of fatalities. Have we really learned anything? Yet despite that, we still continue to send our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters, to war. Their blood is spilled on foreign soils, and for what cause? Their blood is spilled in the conquest for peace, but what peace do we really see? The League of Nations fell and the United Nations rose, with quite solid and different foundations. However, again we see those foundations crumble. As countries become defiant, the United Nations begins to struggle. Just earlier this year, the organisation was seen to react extremely slowly to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. All of you should take a minute to think. Since the end of the Great War, not a day has gone by where conflict and war have been absent from the world, so let us ask ourselves: have we really learned anything?

Andrew Cook (Air Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I put it to you that the very existence of our Armed Forces shows that we have not learned from our experiences and the legacy of the First World War. When the Great War ended, all the major powers – Britain, America, Germany and all the states supplying them – were willing to get rid of their arms, their ships, their weapons and their ammunition, all for peace. What we see today is that the Government is still fighting wars, although at a certain point 100 years ago the Government was ready to get rid of all its ability to fight. But, no, in the end it was not willing to give up its ability to earn money and gather wealth through its ability to fight other nations. The existence of the Cadet Forces, which make people aspire to become military personnel, are basically destroying our ability for peace. If other countries see our nation building a new military, why should they put down their arms? We should put our arms down first. Thank you.

Jack Sweeney (Army Cadets):

Lord Speaker, veterans and fellow cadets, today I will be supporting the view that the Great War has made a tremendous difference to the way we live our lives today, and as a result has made Britain a more globally responsible nation. World War One turned Britain into a nationalistic country and men and women, due to their tremendous efforts in that war, were proud to call themselves British. It is a sense of pride that we still carry today. With the upcoming referendum, more and more people even north of the Border are coming out and saying that we are proud to be British. Some 100 years on, and the war's legacy keeps Britain a proud and nationalistic nation. The last combat veteran of the First World War, Claude Choules, died last year aged 110, which means that no one who served in the Great War is still alive today. However, as we approach the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War, the memory stays strong. Britain now participates in humanitarian conflicts around the world to try to prevent the outbreak of a further world war. We do not live only in a country that remembers the Great War; we live in a country shaped by it. Due to the brave actions of service personnel of this country and others, Britain has been formed into a more globally responsible nation. I therefore urge you to vote for my perspective, that Britain is now a more globally responsible nation. Thank you.

Julia Richmond (Combined Cadet Forces):

One of the things we have learned from the First World War is that we have changed the way in which we engage in conflict. Not since the First World War has a war been fought in a way where more people have died due to the dire conditions than actually from engaging with the enemy. Now wars are fought with less direct human-to-human combat, and as a consequence that has led to a rise in negotiation or wars that are fought in a less destructive manner and where there is a lower human cost. Thank you.

Ethan Jones (Air Cadets):

Lord Speaker, my fellow cadets and veterans, I would like to repeat a point made earlier that we did not learn from World War One because we had World War Two. I want to say that we did learn from that war, but unfortunately World War Two was a war that could not have been dismissed; it had to be done. It was all down to the greed of one man and the whole world would have been taken over. If Britain had not stepped in to stop that war and the whole world from being taken over, who would have? Thank you.

Conor Reed (Air Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, I agree that we are more globally responsible and that we are more socially aware of what is going on with regard to war. But the statement, “We will remember them”, may not necessarily be true. I believe that we have forgotten those who have fallen but may not be dead – those who have fallen and who are living on the streets of our country, right under our noses. We have completely moved away from the idea that we have veterans who are lying homeless in our streets. We are concentrating too much on the future and thinking too much about the past. We need to look at what is going on now and help those veterans who need our help now. Thank you.

Rhianna Stanners (Army Cadets):

Today I want to support the view that the UK has not learned from its experience of World War One. In the time of the Great War, we saw ourselves as a powerful nation, giving us the right to interfere in other countries’ affairs with our great American allies by our side, much like today. Perhaps I may remind you that the Americans joined the First World War when the RMS “Lusitania” was torpedoed by the Germans, killing 120 American citizens, not to back up their British allies. Also, the Americans were provoked into joining World War Two when the Japanese, allies of Germany, attacked Pearl Harbor. What was America’s reason for entering the war in Afghanistan? It was 9/11, and the former President’s battle against terrorism and his “axis of evil” policy. World War One was supposedly the war that ended the class system. I beg to differ, when today 1% of the British population owns 25% of the country’s wealth. There is a huge class divide within the UK, even within our Armed Forces. Those who are commissioned as an officer with a degree will be paid £9,000 more than a non-graduate, even though they will both initially hold the same rank of second lieutenant. Our Army had and still has an overriding factor for promotion and success determined by which independent school the entrants attended rather than their ability. There is still a clear bias towards the middle and upper classes. The UK has not learned from its experience. Thank you.

Olivia Morris (Sea Cadets):

Lord Speaker, fellow cadets and veterans, the world is changing and it has been changing ever since 1914. It is not the lessons that we have previously learned, it is how we adapt ourselves in this modern world to the lessons we have been taught. We need to adapt to the changes that are going on in the world all the time, and that is how we will better shape our nation for the future.

The Lord Speaker (Baroness D’Souza):

We shall now move on to the next stage of the debate. I have to say that you are a truly impressive group of debaters; of that there is no doubt. Again, I offer you my warm congratulations. I am sorry that not everyone has been able to speak, although I am sure that your views would have been extremely interesting. We will now have our final wrap-up speeches, and this is the time when you should think deeply about which way you are going to vote, which will be the next stage.

Closing speeches

Christine Bradford (Royal Naval Reserve Veteran):

Lord Speaker, cadets and fellow veterans, Matt and Elizabeth have ably argued that Britain learned from World War One a salutary lesson that drove us forward to play a globally responsible role in world affairs, becoming a leading player and role model. Today, we are trying to bring morally responsible actions to bear in our dealings with other nations. Matt spoke of the shock of experiencing four years of such unprecedented conflict and of how that shaped our attitude later: our membership of the League of Nations, the United Nations and the European Union, for instance, and of our post-war influence on the international stage. Elizabeth spoke of our ongoing overseas aid to the developing world, of our prominent role in disaster relief and our contribution to peacekeeping and stability, most recently our part in the nuclear deal in Iran.

I would like to sum up our argument not by claiming the moral high ground but by emphasising that we have no choice in this. It is a pragmatic response, and the only sensible approach that we have taken and are taking. We are all linked here on this planet, which seems increasingly small in terms of the great universe. Our living room is fixed and our resources are finite. Water may become the most precious currency of all. On the face of it, we are trying to create a better world for all peoples, but as well as that, we are working out the best way to survive. The Great War was, as we all know, horrible beyond our imagining and senseless in its slaughter. Whatever your thoughts and the luxury of our hindsight, it is sometimes impossible to avoid being drawn into war – and, indeed, World War Two – in order to resist evil intentions, or even a series of unfortunate events. The Great War was no nation's finest hour. Harry Patch, our last surviving British soldier from the trenches, who died in 2009, described it as, "nothing better than legalised mass murder."

What is vitally important is to learn something from war and to drive forward with a desire to avoid more destruction and death. Matt talked of how we have become a role model and a powerful international voice. Elizabeth spoke of our determination to ease suffering and our sense of obligation to others. Like Matt and Elizabeth, I am proud that the UK is a force for good, where we can be, in an increasingly complicated world. We say that we act in a globally responsible way as a result of what has gone before – our involvement in World War One – as the only sane and logical path to tread in our fractured world and upon our precious planet. A tragedy as large as World War One should emphasise our common bonds. As a result of its horrors, we act and we should continue to act as an increasingly globally responsible nation. Thank you.

Samuel Perrin (Army Veteran):

Lord Speaker, cadets and fellow veterans, so far you have heard a compelling argument from my team in support of the proposition that society is more aware of the impact of war. Before I consolidate our argument further, let me address a key point. I want you to think about the word "impact" as it is central to our proposition. Why did the Great War have such an impact on society, and why was that in such stark contrast to the multitude of other campaigns that the British military has been involved in over time?

Soldiers have always known about the brutal impact of war, not only on themselves and their comrades, but on their enemies and the civilians around whom they fight. I say to you that World War One had such a lasting impact on British society because it touched society directly. I am not referring to the famous Zeppelin air raids or the 120,000 British civilians who died as a result of the privations caused by the war, but rather I want to talk about the up to four million men and women who returned to their homes with life-changing injuries, both visible and invisible. Never before had British society had to reintegrate such a large number of people

who had been changed by the horrors of war. This impact was lasting and Omar used tangible examples to show how this led to a step change in the way that British people and society viewed war.

How else have societal attitudes to war changed? In his opening remarks, Omar outlined the exponential growth in the charitable sector in support of a range of military-related causes. What better evidence can there be in support of our proposition than tens of thousands of people selflessly giving up their time to raise tens of millions of pounds for our servicemen and women? I know that there are other veterans in this Chamber who will have had the same experience, but I have helped many soldiers to access this funding and support as they seek to come to terms with the physical and psychological aftermath of combat operations. Omar went on to cite the anti-war protests in 2003, along with the huge growth in technology and the media that now provides people with real-time access to accurate reports of what is going on overseas. The tsunami of information that we now have has allowed society to make up its own mind.

Coco went on to demonstrate that the Great War has altered the old political paradigm that war is always an option in the pursuit of political ends. We take it to be self-evident that changing political attitudes reflects societal developments in understanding in mature democracies like ours. The use of military force is now seen as politically risky instead of prudent, and I put it to you that the legacy of the Great War permeates much that plays out in the modern geopolitical landscape. For example, Parliament's recent rejection of a Government Motion to support the anti-Assad opposition in Syria was in part due to a failure to define the boundaries, and specifically the timeline, of what future military aid of any kind would be. We have not heard philosophical platitudes here; we have heard the presentation of an evidence-based argument which says that contemporary societal and political attitudes to the use of military force were profoundly and enduringly influenced by those terrible years of 1914 to 1918. I urge you to vote for our proposition that society is more aware of war. Thank you.

Wayne Bell (Army Veteran):

Lord Speaker, cadets and fellow veterans, Jonathan and David made some good arguments and I would like to draw them together under two key points. The first key point that was focused on was the social and political effects of World War One and World War Two. We were together as one nation, one big family. But unfortunately now it is just the families and friends of those serving or who have served that deal with the losses and problems that arise from their service.

The second and final point is that we do nothing properly about the consequences of war and the psychological effects of it, which I have personally been through. I know at first hand how it feels to be forgotten and left to tend to my own wounds. I nearly lost my wife and kids due to suffering from PTSD. I have deliberately hurt myself and tried to end my life, but I finally found someone who could help me to change my life permanently. I am now talking to you here, which is a great honour and a testimony to my thankfulness to the people who have helped me. None of them work for the military, but they are all veterans.

Jonathan brought up a point, which is that we always seem to follow America into war in order to help them. If that is the case, we should learn from them. We should follow how America helps its veterans because, in my opinion, they have got it right on perfect. Ladies and gentlemen, we need to understand the effect on everyone involved – not just the military guys but the civilian population as well. That is because after the military leave whatever conflict we have been in, we have to rebuild their families, their lives and their houses. The Government should consider all the consequences of war before getting involved in another conflict. We fought for you, so you should start to fight for us. Thank you.

Votes

The Lord Speaker (Baroness D’Souza):

My thanks to all our closing speakers for their marvellous speeches. We now come to the crunch, which is the voting. There are to be three votes, and please remember that you can vote only once. Please raise your hand clearly so that the Doorkeepers can count your vote and we get a fair result.

Perspective 1: The UK is a more globally responsible nation: 42 votes in favour.

Perspective 2: Society is more aware of the impact of war: 61 votes in favour.

Perspective 3: The UK has not learned from its experience: 73 votes in favour.

The Lord Speaker (Baroness D’Souza):

The voting reflects a clear win for the perspective that the UK as a society has not learned from its experiences of war, which is a very interesting result. All three perspectives were extraordinarily well argued. I have to say that, looking around while the votes were being counted, I think that the 73 who voted for the third perspective are mostly the young. I do not think it was the veterans who voted for that.

Thank you for this extremely interesting debate. I am not sure where it takes us. Most of you are part of the Cadet Forces or veterans, and of course an awful lot of the observers in the Gallery are related to the military. Perhaps our Government and Governments to come should take note of the view that has been expressed largely by the younger generation, despite the fact that all of you are involved in the armed services in one way or another. It was an extraordinarily good debate. As you know, it has been televised and will be broadcast and I think you are all going to be given a short video of these events, as well as a certificate for having taken part.

Before we bring our proceedings to an end, I want to bring in some of the Peers who have attended the debate. I will ask Lord Astor of Hever, who is the Minister for Defence in the House of Lords, to say a few words.

Lord Aster of Hever (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence):

Lord Speaker, my Lords, veterans, cadets and, hopefully, some future members of Britain’s Armed Forces, it is very timely to be discussing the First World War with the commemoration of the 100th anniversary just around the corner. In that war, enormous numbers died, and even though the last Tommies, Harry Patch, Bill Stone and Henry Allingham are no longer here to recollect their first-hand experiences of the Great War, it remains our duty to remember their heroism. I draw your attention to the enormous number of Members of the House of Lords, Peers, staff who worked in this building and the families of Peers who were killed in the First and Second World Wars. Their names are listed on the memorial in the Royal Gallery, which I hope that you were all able to see earlier today.

The First World War was a conflict that touched every part of Britain. Barely a single town or village was left unscathed. Most people have grandparents, great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents who served, and many ex-cadets also served with great distinction. The Great War remains relevant today – in the society that emerged from the embers, we can trace the contours of modern Britain. To ensure that we do not forget World War One, commemorations will take place throughout the country next year. Pupils and teachers will fly out to the Flanders fields to see those poignant memorials at Mons, Ypres, Passchendaele

and Loos for themselves. Commemorative paving stones will be laid to honour those who were awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry. In true British fashion, we are hoping that the famous Christmas Day truce football match that was held on the battlefield will be replayed. Cadets will play a full part in all of this.

Some of you have already been out to France to carry out groundwork on World War One memorials. The veterans in the Chamber with you today will remind you of how important this work is; not only are you honouring the memory of all those who fought to preserve our liberty, but you are also guaranteeing that we can pass on their legacy to future generations. Thank you very much.

Lord West of Spithead (Former First Sea Lord, Royal Navy):

Lord Speaker, my Lords, cadets and fellow veterans, the first thing is to repeat what was said by the Lord Speaker, which is how impressive everyone has been. It has been a most incredible debate, and I have to say that you are rather better than we Peers are at keeping to time – indeed, the Clerk of the Parliaments had better not ding me! The arguments were impressive and succinct, and they have given me great faith in all of you. I have been involved with the cadet forces for 50 years now, and very closely involved over the past six years, both in running the Cadet Vocational Qualifications Organisation and having a Sea Cadet unit of my own. I am very involved with that, and – my goodness me – what an impressive bunch you are. It reinforces for me what wonders the cadet forces can do for our youngsters. Anyone who thinks that the youngsters of this country are not up to it has got it very wrong; I see that when they join the service as well.

In terms of the debate itself, I have to say what a number of you have already said, which is that the greatest lesson this nation learned from the First World War was not to glorify war. Without a doubt, we did not glorify war after that. People went off to war with a spring in their step, thinking that it was a great thing and a boys' own adventure, but – my goodness me – war is not a boys' own adventure. War is bloody, messy and horrible. Those of us who have been in it know that. The other thing is, and sometimes I fear that politicians – I suppose that I could be called one now – forget the fact that you cannot control a war. Once a war starts, particularly if it is big, it will go in directions that no one expects and no one wants. That is why they are so awful.

But that does not mean that we do not have to have military forces that are able to fight, because I am afraid that we are in a very bad world. That statement by former US President Theodore Roosevelt, "Speak softly and carry a big stick," is absolutely valid. There are some very nasty people around. However, we do not embark on these things lightly and we must not ever do that. I fear, as I say, that sometimes politicians think that they can control war better than they can, which is a very dangerous thing. We came very close, in the Syrian conflict, to galloping down a route that we should not have done.

My final statement would be this: did we learn all the lessons from the First World War? No, we did not. Will we ever learn all the lessons from all wars? No, I am afraid that we are human beings and we do not. What is the greatest thing that we can make better today? This was touched on by a number of people. At the end of the First World War, four million people had no legs, jaws missing and other severe injuries including mental injuries. It was impossible for our nation to look after them. No nation could have done that properly. We tried our best and organisations were set up to help, but we could not really do it. We could not really do it even after the Second World War, when again huge numbers of people were involved. Today, because many wars are wars of choice – some of them are right and some I have not thought were right – the numbers involved are such that we really must try to do more to look after those who are scarred and damaged physically and mentally by war. Many people out there are doing good work, which is fantastic, but all of us have to strain every sinew to achieve that. Well done, everyone, and thank you very much.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble:

Lord Speaker, my Lords, cadets and veterans, when my noble friend Lord Selsdon suggested that I might come to the debate this afternoon, I had not realised quite how uplifting it would be. It is timely because I was reading in my old school magazine, which is about the First World War, of the number of young men who died. Three times the number of people now in this Chamber from my old school died in the Great War. Everyone being here today reflects for me service and sacrifice.

I lead for the Government on culture, media and sport. It is why the Government felt it important, as my noble friend Lord Hever said, that two young people and a teacher from every secondary school should go to the Western Front and see it for themselves so that they can then discuss it in their schools and communities. It is why the commemoration of the First World War is of great importance to our nation: the lessons we try to learn. What is also important is how the nations of the Commonwealth feel that this is part of their history, too. It is why, in this Chamber, many Members who have a Commonwealth background will have had family members who fought for Britain. Next year, and then through until 2018, we will be marking and commemorating the events that were seminal in what has followed since.

This debate, as I say, has been a most uplifting and moving experience. I hope very much that both for those who spoke and those who did not – I am conscious of how many people wanted to speak – that it will not be too long before some of you are sitting either on the Green Benches or on these Red Benches. One sometimes hears that this country may not be what it was. I think that we have seen today that this country is in very good hands.

Baroness Garden of Frognal:

Lord Speaker, my Lords, cadets and veterans, this has been an absolutely outstanding debate. We are great risk on these Benches of agreeing with each other although we all come from different parts of the Chamber, so that does not always happen here. The debate has been impressive. My late husband had a 30-year career in the Royal Air Force in which he went from Air Cadet to Air Marshal. He and I have never ceased to be amazed at the outstanding achievements of our cadet forces and I pay tribute to you and, indeed, to all the volunteers who enable you to make those achievements.

I note two particular things about this debate. The first is the quality of the thought you all put into it because you really have given us food for thought in your contributions. Equally impressive was the way in which you delivered your presentations. It does immense credit to your organisations and it actually does credit to this House, too. Thank you all very much indeed. I echo my colleague in saying that I hope very much that we will see you back in this place later on.

Lord Haskel:

My Lords, I would like to add my tributes to the compliments that have been paid. It has been a wonderful and really outstanding debate; I congratulate you all. I agree that the delivery and the way you have spoken has been very good indeed. What is important for us is to listen to people who are outside the House of Lords. You have now told us that the United Kingdom has not learned from its experience in the First World War, and we have to listen to that and come to some conclusions. We have got to ask: how have we not learned from it? Have we not learned diplomatically because we are getting into other wars? Have we not learned socially because we are not looking after veterans and those who have been bereaved well enough? Have we not learned militarily because we are not quite sure how to conduct wars any more? You have set us a bit of a conundrum and all Members of the House of Lords will have to think about it.

Conclusion

The Lord Speaker (Baroness D'Souza):

It is true that the quality of your contributions and the strength of your convictions have been truly impressive. Perhaps I may add that I salute the courage and honesty of those who have been prepared to talk about their personal experiences. All in all, this has been a moving and very uplifting day. There are questions that have been raised which we ought to think about, and perhaps we will have another debate of this kind in the near future, either here or in the Robing Room because we would love to keep you engaged. The views that you have expressed do not, or should not, disappear into the ether. People in the House of Lords debate with passion the issues that affect our society, which obviously include the Armed Forces and questions about war and conflict. We need to know the views of people like you and to feed them into our debates. This has been a learning experience for us as well, and I thank you.

I imagine that you know – if you do not, I will tell you – that a great deal of work goes on behind the scenes in order to arrange an occasion such as this, and I shall run through a very short list of those who have been particularly wonderful, apart from yourselves obviously, in setting up the debate. I have talked about the English Speaking Union and its team of mentors, and I have referred to the Royal British Legion and the Ministry of Defence. I would like particularly to single out the Yeoman Usher, Neil Baverstock, who supervised the security for this event which made it possible for it to go ahead, and I am deeply grateful to our Doorkeepers, in particular the Assistant Principal Doorkeeper, Mr Evans, and his team. We thank you so much for coming here on a non-sitting Friday to ensure that today has run as smoothly as it did. Last but by no means least I warmly thank everyone involved in the House of Lords offices and public engagement and outreach programmes who have worked so hard to make this work; it doesn't just happen – precise timing is involved. I reiterate what Lord West said – you were amazing at keeping to time; would that you were Members of this House!

I will leave the Chamber now, as I usually do, and the Doorkeepers will help to show you out when I have left. Once again, I thank you all most profoundly and wish you a very safe journey home. I hope that I will see you all again in the near future. Thank you.

Note on participants

The House of Lords worked with the English-Speaking Union (ESU) to devise and deliver the debate model.

The ESU trained the key teams and floor speakers on the debate options. Ahead of the debate there were 16 regional talking days, giving the cadets and veterans the chance to meet, share experiences and discuss issues central to the debate.

There were three angles for debate, led by three key teams:

1. The UK is a more globally responsible nation
2. Society is more aware of the impact of war
3. The UK has not learned from its experience.

Following the talking days, selection heats were organised by the individual services and run by the ESU. The winners of each competition formed the key teams responsible for leading the chamber debate in the Lords.

Each key team comprised two cadets and a veteran. Key floor speakers who were called on in the debate were also selected through the heats.

The House of Lords worked with the Royal British Legion and the Ministry of Defence to recruit participants for the event.

Find out more

Contact us or go online for information about business, membership and outreach activities.

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