

Letter from Westminster



Steve Brine: MP for Winchester

OVER the Easter weekend I read in *The Guardian* how President Trump is coming in for heavy criticism. Not health-care reform or travel bans this time but not preparing adequately for the White House Easter egg roll.

Apparently the Obamas went the whole hog; making outfits and reading stories to the children whereas The Donald has not recruited staff for the event which has run since 1878.

I am not averse to criticism of the POTUS (his reported hostility to the Paris Climate agreement is bad news) but this seemed a little harsh given world events – Syria, Afghanistan and North Korea – understandably on the mind of the Administration.

Syria first and I remember in August 2013 being recalled for an emergency vote on military strikes, alongside the US, against Assad. As history records, the House of Commons voted down a motion designed to deter the further use of chemical weapons and I noted at the time Putin's ominous welcome for David Cameron's defeat.

I thought then - and now - that refusing to back Cameron that day was political opportunism of the worst kind and we would have to return to the issue sooner or later, most likely with a more complex (ie; Russian involved) situation on the ground.

So, the US action this month - targeted on the airfield in Shayrut which was used to launch the latest chemical weapons attack - was rightly supported by our Government as an appropriate and proportionate response intended to deter further use.

The strike in Afghanistan, using the distastefully named MOAB, targeted a system of tunnels and caves that Islamic State used to move around freely. We may not be sure if that is fact or fake (news) but, if it denies an organisation that wishes us in Britain real harm, then we should support America's action.

Finally, North Korea, and escalating tensions this past fortnight have frightened us all. In themselves, Pyongyang's missile tests and military parades are nothing new and every time the Western media grants Kim Jong-un his wish.

Events have the feel of, what the *New York Times* called, the 'Cuban missile crisis in slow motion' but Trump's declaration that the "era of strategic patience" with North Korea is over appears to be speeding things up.

I will be asking our Prime Minister to exercise as much influence as she can over the President to be extremely cautious in this tinder box.

My hope is that America's renewed muscular interventionist foreign policy in the region has moved China to exert its influence with a threat to cut off financial links and energy supplies — North Korea's twin lifelines.

So I like an Easter egg hunt as much as the next man but if it wasn't quite up to par this year, I could understand why.

**Steve Brine
MP for Winchester and
Chandler's Ford**