

The Sylvans

Detailed summary powered by AI

20 July 2026

Motion: the West should leave the Middle East to its own devices.

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Analysis of the outcome

The motion was defeated 13 to 3 with one abstention, and the reason sits in plain view in almost every speech. The room accepted the proposition's history and rejected its conclusion. Speaker after speaker agreed that Western involvement had been extractive, cynical and destabilising, then declined to accept that withdrawal followed from any of it. The proposition never closed the gap between the wrong it described and the remedy it proposed, and the opposition was never made to close it either.

The proposition's case: colonialism, oil, dependency

The opening speech was a strong piece of historical argument and a weak piece of advocacy, and the two are separable. Its history was detailed and went almost entirely uncontested: Sykes-Picot, the conversion of the navy to oil, the petrodollar, 1953, monarchies dependent on external security guarantees. Nobody in the room stood up to defend that record, and three speakers volunteered further evidence for it without being asked.

What the speech did not do was argue for the action the motion names. It established that the West had caused harm and asked, four times over, why the harm continued. Leaving was offered as the obvious inference rather than as a proposal with consequences of its own. Once a floor speaker pointed at Afghanistan and said that this is what leaving looks like, the inference stopped being obvious, and the proposition had nothing prepared for it.

The closing tried to repair that by widening the frame rather than narrowing it, taking in the funeral in Tehran, the Iran-Iraq war, the Dark Ages and the Nazi occupation of Europe. Each of those answered a specific speaker. None of them answered the question of what the West should actually do next, which is what the motion had put in front of the room.

The opposition's case: responsibility, engagement, persistence

The opposing speech made one structural move that decided the shape of the evening. It conceded the history completely and then used it as the argument for staying: if the West made the mess, the West owes the work of clearing it. That converted the proposition's strongest material into the opposition's premise, and left the proposition arguing against a case that had already absorbed its evidence.

Its second move was to attack the motion's language rather than its sentiment, calling the wording insulting for what leaving people to their own devices implies about them. Three later speakers reached for the same objection independently, two of them calling the motion poorly worded. When a third of the floor is quarrelling with the phrasing, the drafting has become the subject, and a motion rarely wins on those terms.

Her closing added the only positive case of the evening for the region itself: Persian civilisation, Arabic translations of Greek texts, a nuclear programme built under sanctions, drones that made Western defence

planners think again. Whether or not those examples persuade, they were the only ones offered all evening that treated the region as an actor rather than as a site.

The ebb and flow of the floor debate in the Middle East debate

Four battlegrounds opened, and the proposition lost three of them.

Whose aggression, and over what timescale. The proposition rested on a period running from Sykes-Picot to the present. Two speakers widened the frame to Marathon, Plataea and the Crusades, and a third made the underlying point explicit: whoever chooses the timescale chooses the villain. That did not refute the proposition so much as strip it of the claim to be plainly describing history rather than selecting from it.

Stability as a credential. One speaker built a case for intervention on British stability since 1688. The reply, ten prime ministers since the Brexit vote, was the sharpest exchange of the night, and it did what the opening speech had not: it made the asymmetry look absurd rather than merely unjust. This is the one battleground the proposition won outright.

Blowback against consequence. The best proposition speech of the evening came from the floor, running Iraq, Libya, Syria and Iran as a single argument that intervention creates what it later claims to be fighting. Nobody answered it on its own terms. The room absorbed it and voted the other way, because the speech explained how the mess was made without saying what should now be done with it.

The wording itself. One speaker made the decisive move by separating the motion's parts. He would have supported a narrower motion about the attack on Iran, or about imperial damage, but not one that also ruled out diplomacy, sanctions and an arms embargo. Once leaving was shown to include leaving Israel and Iran unconstrained, several people who agreed with the proposition's history had a reason to vote against its motion.

What the floor added in the Middle East debate

This was a rapid debate, so both opening speeches were made extemporaneously and the room reasoned its way forward in public. That shows in where the good arguments sit. The most complete case for the motion arrived eighth, from the floor. The objection that decided the vote arrived seventh, also from the floor. Both openers framed the territory, and neither found the argument the evening turned on.

The room's working definition moved as well. It began with the West as an abstraction and ended with four specific instruments on the table: military action, diplomacy, sanctions and an arms embargo. That distinction was not available when the first two speakers sat down, and it is what the count was eventually taken on.

What the Middle East debate left unexamined

Nobody defined either term. The West shifted between America, Britain, Europe and the whole global north depending on who was speaking, and the Middle East expanded to take in Afghanistan, Sudan and the Congo. One speaker noticed the second problem and used it, asking where the region is supposed to end, but the first went unremarked all evening.

Israel entered seven speeches in, raised by a speaker who remarked on its absence. For a motion about Western involvement in the region, debated weeks after an American and Israeli attack on Iran, that is a striking omission. It left the most contested material of the night, in both closing speeches, to arrive at the point where nobody could reply to it.

What drove the result

Three things, in order of weight. The opposition took ownership of the proposition's history and converted it into a duty to stay, so the proposition's evidence stopped working for it about six minutes in. The motion's absolutism was then exposed as covering diplomacy and sanctions, which cost it the votes of people who agreed with everything except the remedy. And the wording gave four separate speakers something to object to before they reached the substance.

A narrower motion would have fared better, and one speaker said as much while explaining his vote. The chair called the result clear and unexpected, and at least one member said afterwards that he had read the room the other way. That is a fair measure of how little the two opening speeches settled.

The room was not defending the Western record. Almost nobody attempted that, and the two speeches that came closest argued from Gulf prosperity and from a hypothetical family in Iran rather than from history. What the room refused was an inference. Guilt establishes a debt, and this house could not see how walking away pays it.

Detailed transcript

The motion, and the case for stepping back

The motion is: the West should leave the Middle East to its own devices.

Good evening, everyone. Well, we are all familiar with the current situation. America and Israel are at war with Iran. They illegally attacked Iran, and when we say illegally, it was a unilateral decision. It was not approved by the United Nations, it was not approved by Congress, and by all measures, and even lots of Americans would say it was an illegal attack.

We have been interfering with the Middle East since, well, actually since even before oil was discovered. Going back thousands of years, we have Christendom, and then we have the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Empire, and there has been this sort of conflict between the two. But really, in the modern age, since the Ottoman Empire receded, one of the drivers was that Churchill converted the navy from coal to oil. So oil became a strategic resource, and then it became strategically necessary to control the Middle East.

Oil, Sykes-Picot and the making of a dependent region

Even though we were at various odds with the French during the Second World War, the British and the French had decided to take over the Middle East, under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and share the spoils of the remains of what was the Ottoman Empire.

Population-wise, if we just look at how many people in the Middle East have been kept in poverty for most of the twentieth century. If we just take Iran now, the population is roughly 92, 93 million people just in that one country. Not only have they been kept in poverty, but you have had all of the populations of Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Jordan, in essence, kept in poverty. The monarchies in lots of these countries, the ruling elite, they are, in essence, puppet governments. They are not really sovereign. In order to make really important decisions, they always need to run it by some other country, and the Middle Eastern monarchies have been kept in this state of dependence.

One of the reasons was that the Americans offered security guarantees. We have got the petrodollar, which is the Americans coercing the Middle Eastern countries to sell their oil in US dollars, and that helped keep the US economy afloat after the 1971 break with the gold standard. Anyway, there is all of this stuff going on, but the main point is that the Middle East has been kept in a state of poverty and dependence by the West because of resources: initially land, taking over what was left of the Ottoman Empire, and then oil. And oil is the root of pretty much all industrialised products and services.

And so the core of the argument is: why are we keeping them poor? Why are we keeping them dependent? Why are we keeping tens of millions of people in poverty? Why are we not really allowing them to develop and become even democracies? Iran in 1953 had a democratically elected government, and that has been a consistent pattern across the countries within the region. And these are empires, civilisations that stretch back thousands of years. Persian Empire, Ottoman Empire. It is not as if they are not capable. So it is a form of colonialism that extends to the present day, and it should end.

The opposition: the wording, and who drew the lines

Let me just start off by saying how insulting this motion is. Left to their own devices, right? They are just a bunch of, sorry, they are just a bunch of uncivilised animals, and we should just keep our disease from them, right?

I think that first of all, maybe I can see why there is a certain sense of frustration. I can see that these problems are intractable, and they have been going on for a very long time. And the cycle of violence keeps

repeating itself, and somehow there seems to be no resolution whatsoever. But let us just take a step back and look at the historical context. A lot of the problems and instability we see in the Middle East today are a product of Western decision making. The Sykes-Picot line that you cited, that simply a couple of diplomats sat in a drawing room somewhere and just drew lines on a map without regard for what was the lived reality of those people.

So I do think that we as a whole bear historical responsibility. I think the Western countries do bear historical responsibility for the mess that they created, and they have to help resolve these issues. Even keeping aside historical responsibility, it is a vast region with more than a billion people, who are adherents to the fastest growing faith in the world. Are we really going to turn our backs on maybe almost an eighth of humanity? They are human beings too, and we have the resources and the energy to do so, and we have to do so.

Dubai, demographics and diplomacy

Let us maybe look at the more practical aspects of it. Whether we like it or not, it is a major reservoir of oil. Notwithstanding our efforts to move to a green economy and to de-oil our economy, it is still a very vital resource, something that we are seeing today. It shows up in our energy bills.

But still, all of this frames it as a negative, as a problem and something to be managed by all of us. Do we really not think that the Arab world or the Middle East has anything to offer the world? Off the top of my head, there is Dubai chocolate. I do not know about you, but I love it. This region has positive demographics, and is growing rapidly. This region is reforming itself. It is trying. It has become more modernised. It is becoming more educated. It is becoming more westernised, notwithstanding the caricatured portrayal in American media, Fox News and all.

And Dubai, for example, is the new crossroads of the world. That is where Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Central Asia meet. That is where the world truly meets. It is no longer London or even New York, for that matter. The centres of finance, yes, and it attracts a lot of people, yes, but where people are truly meeting today is in the Middle East. Do we really want to disengage from such a region?

Obviously the question can be raised: what can we do? We invest so much energy and so many resources into it, and yet we cannot seem to solve this problem. To put it simply, you have to engage diplomacy. There are conflicts in our own history. We have had wars that ran for a hundred years, wars that have dragged on, but eventually there is a resolution, and that resolution happens because of diplomacy. Finally people sit down, and when the right moment arrives, peace is found.

I agree, maybe this is not the right moment, and I would say it is partly and almost entirely because of a strange man in the White House. But I do believe that peace is a responsibility. It is an opportunity, and I think we should not shirk from our responsibilities to bring it about. Thank you.

Waves of aggression, and who is the belligerent now

Well, Mr Chairman, the problem I have with this motion is I am not sure it is the Middle East at the moment that is causing the conflicts. Certainly America is at the moment the main belligerent in the area, and seems to have a reason to attack what I would call Persia. So leaving them to their own devices seems to be somewhat out of key with what actually is going on. I think that is perhaps the point that the opposition are taking.

If you look back in history, then you will find there are waves of aggression coming out of that region anyway. Some of the major battles of antiquity, Marathon and Plataea for example, are defeats of Persians who were coming into the Mediterranean civilisation. If those battles had not been successful, our futures could have been very different. So I am not sure that it is us fomenting warfare, although at the moment, obviously, America is doing that.

You had interference also by what you would basically call the Mediterranean civilisations. You had a succession of crusades because our Holy Land was situated there. The Pope declared a crusade, and great troops of people marched or rode all the way there, and you got a series of battles, and you even got the Normans, who managed to conquer England and form England into a long-term possession. The Normans formed a kingdom in Jerusalem, and I think they had a female queen there for a while. That did not survive forever.

But we have either been belligerent. I had a grandfather who was a colonel in the Royal Engineers. I knew he served in the Palestine region during the First World War. I did not know what he did until I went to a talk in one of the bodies I am a member of, and he was fighting the Turks. So, not directly concerned with the world, but the Turks actually were allied to Germany, but they only actually operated in that part of the world. He was fighting the Turks in 1914, so this conflict has been going on there right up from the early times. Our crusades, invasions of the Western world several times, in the fact that I mentioned. I do not think really, if we pull out, it is going to make much difference. Question mark.

Playing tinker toys, and the claim to stability

Could you repeat the motion again, please? The West should leave the Middle East to its own devices.

So, my fellow Sylvans, do I believe it is right that the Western powers should play tinker toys with the Middle Eastern powers? For example, the deposing of a democratically elected Iranian president in 1953. No, I do not believe it is right. I always hate the idea of us playing the great powers and playing about with the fortunes of the weaker powers, as famously the European countries did during their colonial expansion. Hate the idea of it. I would not like my country, our country, to suddenly have a stronger power coming and saying, right, you have elected this person, now we are going to install a puppet leader. I do not like it. So yes, on one level I would agree with the motion.

But following on from what the previous speaker said, is it right or wrong for stronger powers to intervene in the lives of less stable powers? That brings me to the other side, because there is a case to be made. I think that not that stronger powers should intervene with less stable powers for the sake of it, for pure power reasons. They do not. They really do not. Even if you look at Roman colonialism centuries ago, a lot of the Romans did not want to have an overseas empire. It was only in their self-defence that they actually started building an empire in the Mediterranean. Even with the British, it took a long time, through centuries, for the British to build up their empire from just being what is basically a trading business.

However, there is such a thing as stable nations and unstable nations. England is one of the exceptions, because since at least 1688 we have actually been a fairly stable nation. Put it this way: we were not invaded by Nazi Germany. We have not deposed a king since the 1640s. We have not had a civil war since the 1600s. We are a stable power. The Middle East, bless the Middle East, is not as stable.

Now, I definitely think we should not be deposing the leaders. However, if there are terrorist cells brewing there, if there are powers such as the regime of Iran, then there is a case to be made that we should not just leave them to their own devices, but actually use our stability, the base for our intelligence services, to intervene in a way that is positive and can actually help foment peace in the Middle East. We will not get that by just leaving the Middle East to its own devices. It is not easy. It is messy, and I would definitely not put myself forward to do it. However, I think the case can be made that the Middle East should not be left to its own devices. If the Western powers are peaceful and stable, we can intervene and make peace.

Ten prime ministers, and minding our own business

Good evening. I was considering walking up in an unstable fashion, but people who did not know me might have wondered who was actually going up to speak.

I live in a country that has had 10 prime ministers since Brexit. When I was younger you would not get 10 prime ministers in 10 years, in 20 years. People were leaders of their party for how many years? If we look at who we consider the most powerful country, for some reason, I do not consider a country the most powerful just because it has got the most landmass. They do not have rules that unite the whole country, so that is unstable. So who are we to talk about the Middle East being unstable? I was trying to Google it, but I do not have enough time. Most of the leaders in those countries are there for a long time. It is only because, and as far as I am concerned, the West keeps interfering.

In 1953 Churchill went along with America when he got rid of the leader and put in their own person, who was answerable to them. He turned out to be so bad that in 1973 the Ayatollah came in. And the thing is, the people there are not necessarily asked if they like their leader. We outside decide that they do not like the leader. In this country, do you think we like foreigners telling us what to do? Even if you live here, people do not want you telling them what to do. So let us be clear. We need to mind our own business.

I am going to give a good example. Saddam Hussein. I am not going to say I am a supporter of him, but he used to have American backing, and he used to kowtow to the Americans. But then he said no, I have done it enough times. And then it was in the papers that this is a bad man. He is gone, and I am not going to say whether I am for him going or not. But it has been said in this room, and not by me, by people who are more knowledgeable about the Middle East, that the Middle East is now less stable because he is not there.

So therefore, if we as outsiders keep interfering, we are not going to help. And why are we going in? It is oil. Why are we not interfering in the Congo? Mind you, that is because we want what they have got to offer. Sort out your own country first. Mind your own business.

Sykes-Picot, Mossadegh and the blowback argument

I am going to agree with the motion about the West not interfering in the Middle East. Sykes-Picot has been mentioned, which was basically when you had Britain and France carve up the Middle East during the First World War, taking over the territories that the Ottomans initially occupied. But when they did this, when they drew the borders of Iraq, they deliberately drew the border so that you would have a Sunni, a Shia and a Kurdish region, deliberately to foster religious and ethnic tensions, so that they could divide and rule the country, so that the British could exploit that oil.

Iran has been mentioned, 1953, which has been mentioned a few times. The thing is, if the CIA and the British had not overthrown Mossadegh in 1953 and installed the Shah, Iran could have still been a democracy. It could have been a very different Middle East. And the thing is, this theocracy in Iran exists because of this intervention. This is basically a blowback from Western intervention. You see these people vilifying the theocracy in Iran, but it is the result of Western intervention way back in 1953.

And I have heard about this thing about stability and terrorism. Well, the thing is, it is the Western intervention, by overthrowing these secular dictatorships in Iraq, in Libya, in Syria, that has actually destabilised these countries. It created civil war in Iraq. How did Iran increase its power in Iraq? That was through the regime change. It got rid of the dictator. You had Sunni and Shia in a Shia majority country, and then Iran basically used the Shiites in Iraq to increase their influence. You talk about hating Iran. You have empowered Iran. You got rid of Gaddafi in Libya. What did that do? That just led to a migrant crisis across the Mediterranean. We had literally millions of people. That led to changing the political scope of the West.

And I hear this thing: oh, but if we do not let the West intervene in the Middle East, then you will have Russia and China and Iran increasing their influence. Well, they got rid of Assad in Syria. Not a good person. The reason that they got rid of Assad in Syria was not because he was a dictator, because the West supports dictatorships in the Middle East. They got rid of him because he was number one a nationalist leader, but number two because he was aligned with Russia and Iran.

You get rid of Assad. Now who do you have in Syria? You have got the former deputy of Al Qaeda and the former deputy of ISIS now in Damascus. So I think basically the Western intervention in the Middle East has been completely maligned. The reason why the West intervenes in the Middle East has got nothing to do with democracy or human rights. It is about exploiting their natural resources, and it is also about increasing their hegemony, their domination in the world. So you have more of these puppet presidents and puppet leaders that serve their interests. Thank you.

Choosing a timescale, and what happened when the West left Iran alone

It has been very interesting to listen to people with different perspectives on this, particularly that we have had some very different timescales, which has taken us back to Roman times and before, and then we have talked a lot about shorter timescales, 1953. And that is the problem. You pick any timescale, and you can blame the person who was in charge at that time and made that decision. But which timescale you pick, it is just up to you.

I think this motion presupposes that there was some sort of utopian time before the West interfered, where everything was happy in the Middle East. The previous speaker has taken us through that, and other people have. That is just not been the case. There have been wars of expansion in the Middle East for thousands of years. So I would say there was not a utopia before. Are we going to believe that there will be one now?

Well, I guess we probably have some evidence in this century, because with another timescale, since 1979, we have experimented one versus the other. We have kind of intervened in places like Saudi Arabia and Dubai, and God knows we have enough Qatari money in London, but we did not interfere in Iran. So the West left Iran alone. And what has happened? Iran is the biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world. Some might say that Hamas and the Houthis and Hezbollah are all part of Iran, and they foster wars wherever they go, October the seventh being the latest and largest attempt to start a war, which they succeeded in doing. So when we have left them alone, that is what has happened.

We can imagine, if the West gets out of the Middle East, will there be stability? No. Well, first of all, Israel will be gone. That will be messy. Where do we define the Middle East? Sudan, Yemen. These are not great places. And there is no stability there. So I do not think we have any reason to believe that the Middle East, without the interference it had, some bad, some good, but the net result is, it is probably better than the alternative.

Treating the region as an equal

I would say that maybe the wording is not the best when it comes to the motion, but I do agree that I do not think the West abandoning the region is for the best of the Middle East. I am concerned, however, thinking about, for example, Afghanistan and the state of the country as it is now after the United States has left. But at the same time, I do think it is not as much as the West has created complications in the Middle East. It is not for us to, let us say, babysit this country into democracy or stability.

I do think that it is a responsibility that we have to treat them, let us say, like equals politically, and allow them, sorry, I am using very loose terms, but allowing the overall region to rule themselves in democracy with us. If they want to have a ruling family in terms of the country, that should be their own decision. But I do think that the world is not an isolated place, and it is always preferable to have that channel of communication and democracy, even if the country turns out to be, let us say, even a bit more authoritarian.

However, I do think that human rights should be respected all over the world, and if the citizens of a country that is being more authoritarian want to exit that country, there should be a safe corridor to do that. I do not think intervention by war is a solution, because it creates more displacement. It creates more aggressiveness from both sides. And I do believe that is not the best course. But again, we look at Africa and we look at how

France has so much power over the currency in 14 countries in Africa, and we see how, as much as they have left them alone, let us say, they still have a lot of economic or colonial power over them. So again, I am worried about how that would look if the West would take a step back. So, yes, thank you.

The wording, Israel and the Strait of Hormuz

So the proposal is worded that the Middle East should be left to its own devices, and what I argue is that this implies that any involvement in the Middle East should be abandoned. Now, this should be rejected. If the proposal was worded in a way such as, was the Israeli and American attack against Iran, assassinating the Ayatollah, was that a good idea, I would be in favour of that proposal. Likewise, if the question was, has British and French imperialism in the region had lasting damage, I would be in favour of that.

But the proposal is wider. Left to its own devices also requires a complete absence of diplomatic actions, sanctions against wrongs committed in the region. That we must disagree with, and I think this for two main arguments. One, Israel has not been mentioned yet, but I think I have to raise it. Two, Iran.

Israel is in the Middle East. I do not think you can deny that. But first, the Israeli argument. Israel is breaking international law through its occupation and settlement in the West Bank and in Gaza. The situation in Gaza is truly horrifying. It is really hard to understand. I read an article recently that there is so much damage in the region, with bodies stuck in rubble which cannot be moved because they are not allowed heavy equipment in to move the rubble, that the bodies are just sitting there rotting, rats and pests spread, with no ability to remove it or to clean up, leaving those who are still alive to suffer in this mad max situation with no potential or hope in sight.

If we leave the region to its own devices, we give Israel an even freer hand than it currently has. That suffering will continue. It will get worse. Now, I am sceptical as to what the British government can do directly. However, greater diplomatic action, sanctions, at least a military embargo, will hopefully limit the suffering and perhaps lead to the possibility of some sort of long-term peace solution. If you leave it to its own devices, suffering will continue and get worse.

Two, Iran. Now, as I said, the Israeli and American attack against Iran earlier this year was a foolhardy and reckless action, which has made the situation worse for all. Now it has happened, what do we do? Iran wants to impose fees on the Strait of Hormuz. That is something that the West and the British government should not tolerate. If you allow Iran to collect fees over the Strait of Hormuz, not only would all oil costs be greater for all of us, but perhaps the Indonesians would also like to impose tolls on their waterways, and Malaysia as well. It must be something that diplomatic actions and sanctions should stop, and we should make sure that happens to ensure a lasting peace in the region. Thank you.

The Gulf states, and wanting somebody to bust in

So, number one, I think it is quite a poorly worded motion. I agree with you. It is almost insulting, the way that stuff about we should leave them to their own devices. But when I think about the Middle East, when we think about this motion, we think about places like Iran or Iraq or Syria. What we tend to forget is places like Qatar or Saudi Arabia, or wherever, the rich states, those states which have implemented an effective economic plan over many, many years, and their societies and their people have reaped the benefits of that. Those countries decided that the best way to do it is to try and work in partnership with the West, and by working in partnership with the West they became wealthier, and a lot of their people became wealthy. There is no income tax in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

But there are places where things are not so great, and we think, you know, I think you talk about poverty, and yes, there is a lot of poverty in the Middle East. There are certain places where you think, hey, this is not going so well. What we are talking about here is: should we have gone into Iran, and should we have gone

into Iraq? And okay, we can all go back 50 years, 1993, the first Iraq war. But today, I think, yes, we should be in Iran.

I do not know about you, but I think that if I was sitting in Iran, I would want somebody busting in. I would not want them to be standing at the side. If I was a normal person, if I was trying to raise a family, if I had children who were being destroyed by their own leaders, and those leaders are there because they just want power, they have got no interest at all in the normal person. It is disgraceful.

So if you want us to butt out, I mean, there is a lot about Western imperialism and what have you. It is a bit lazy, really. I think we do not live in that type of world. We are not in the 1850s any more. People keep harping back to it, but we have gone beyond that. Most Western countries want the Middle East to succeed and for their people to have good lives. That is all we want. Thank you.

Consequence, asylum and enforcing peace

Good evening, Sylvans. It is quite a prickly debate, to be fair, because I do not think that the motion is well defined enough that you can actually take the stance that you would like to take. I think we have heard, if you take different time measurements, you will find different belligerents and different reasons for being involved, and there is a logic that the West should never have been involved. The reality of the world that we live in, though, is that those decisions were taken. It did happen. There is a bit of a mess there.

When I look back on just the most recent significant escalation of conflict there in Iran, I look back to what caused the United States to go into that. There were revolutions, there were killing protesters in the street by the thousands, and that is not acceptable anywhere on the face of the planet. It could have been in Africa, it could have been in Asia. I would have expected somebody who could do something about a regime doing that to people to actually get involved in that. I am not a proponent of war. I do not think it is the solution to most of our problems. I think that there is a diplomatic solution that we should be pursuing. I think that the West should be involved in what is going on in the Middle East, and maybe from a different perspective.

The West has been involved there. We have created instability. It has resulted in multiple waves of violence moving this way and that way. And the reality is that displaces ordinary peace-loving folk. And the West should be embracing asylum seekers to some extent, because there are true people that have good intent, that want to build a peaceful life, that can add value to your society, that should actually be welcomed into the West.

You hear this narrative of anti-immigration, and I agree with it to some extent, that you do not want to change the demographics of your country. But the reality is, you meddled in another part of the world and made it uninhabitable. So you have to deal with the consequence of that. You created some of that problem, therefore you should have the burden of having some of the responsibility of doing what you can to fix that.

The reality is, how do we find peace in the Middle East? And that is the secret sauce, right? Nobody knows how to do that in reality. I think that there are so many conflicting ideas and emotions and secular beliefs and religious beliefs and approaches to how they want to govern their society, that there is no direct line of sight on peace in the Middle East, and that is what we should be doing. And the West should be doing everything that they can to do that. They should not be sending more tanks and drones and all that shit to kill people. That is not what they should be doing. They should be enforcing peace, stopping regimes from murdering thousands of people in the street when they are legitimately protesting for a change of their regime. Thank you.

Humanism, moderation and the United Nations

So I am taking this motion in a more general sense because, as it was said just before me, the answer that you give to this motion will be contextual in history, but I am more interested in what is the idea, or what we are

all aiming for in this room.

I consider myself a humanist, and I believe most, if not all, of the people in this room would. What does it mean? It means that we have a responsibility towards other humans because they share similar traits to us, and because they share similar traits and they have a similar identity, we are looking for the same objectives in life: excellence, justice, health, happiness. And because we are driving towards the same objective and we have the same trajectory in life, this is the opportunity for us to build connections. I am going to add that together we have more resources to achieve these common goals, but if we are all separated, we are going to take more time. It is going to be less achievable.

So now that this is defined, the intervention. There is this concept that comes from Plato in ancient Greece. He was talking about the war with the Persians back in the days, and he was saying there is a war with them, but with Sparta, because we are Athens, it is not a war, it is actually an act of moderation, because we are similar to them, and they are doing something that is wrong, and we need to moderate them. Now that we know more, and we have a global view of the world, and we are more humanist, we can have this approach towards other people. We do not go to war towards them, but we have to moderate them. Genital mutilations, genocides. I hope that everybody in here will be for the intervention in order to moderate the populations or the regimes that are applying them.

Now, we need an objective method in order to determine if the genital mutilation, if the genocide, is bad. What gives us the legitimacy? If one entity has the same legitimacy as another, who is right? You need a method which is analogous to the scientific method in order to define what is objectively right, and it is possible using human reason, and this is how we went to science. And reason is our capability to detach ourselves from our subjective incentives and our will of power.

That said, nations are still subjective in themselves, because we are all humans and we also want what is good for us and we have all sorts of biases. So nations are suboptimal entities to define and act, because they will still act towards their interest at least partly. The optimal we can reach is at the scale of humanity, and we need the highest overarching entity possible to have this maximum detachment from our subjective interests, which is, I believe, and I have big hope for, the United Nations. I would like more of the United Nations to act with this agenda and having a way, through consensus and scientific methods, to determine what is right and being able to act. Thank you.

Closing for the opposition: persistence and civilisation

Thank you all for some very interesting perspectives and very useful insights. I will try to incorporate as much as I can.

Does the West bear historical responsibility? Absolutely. Second, if there are problems in one part of the world, can they really be walled off in that part of the world? The answer is quite simply no. Three. Does the West have no interests? Even a cynical, transactional man in the White House can appreciate that there is a lot of oil there, oil that we need to power our economies and to keep our inflation under control and to live the good lives that we live in the West. Fourth, have interventions failed in the past? Yes. So what? Try again.

Diplomacy is the art of the possible. Diplomacy is about finding solutions to intractable problems, but the key is persistence, perseverance, and history will always offer up the right moment, the right leader at the right place at the right time. But we can only seize that moment if we are there and we are trying.

But still, all these arguments showcase the Middle East as a zone of mad hordes just killing each other all the time, with an occasional American bomber flying in and killing a few people. This is a civilisation. Persian civilisation is one of the great civilisations in the world. A lot of our knowledge of Western civilisation was

actually taken from ancient Greece, translated into Arabic, and it is this discovery of Arabic texts that is the foundation of the knowledge base of Western civilisation.

We talked about the nuclear programme. A country that has been sanctioned to hell has managed to put together a nuclear programme on its own. They have built Shahed drones, which prompted the West to actually rethink its own defences. All of this speaks to a culture that is vibrant, people who are intelligent, people who have so much to offer the world, and I think it is in humanity's interest. It is in our self-interest. It is the humane thing to do, and I would say that yes, intervention is justified, is needed, in every sense of the matter. Thank you.

Closing for the proposition: colonialism has not ended

So I made a lot of notes, so I am going to go through them. There may be some crisscrossing and some concepts that I repeat.

Somebody has said that colonialism ended, that this was something that happened in the 1750s, 1850s. No, it has not ended. In the rich West and the global north you may think it has ended. That is the narrative. But if you are from the global south, the poor parts of the world, no, it has been consistent. It has not ended. This is a myth that we tell ourselves.

There has been this idea that the Middle East cannot do self-determination. It is just one of these Western narratives. Nonsense. These civilisations are thousands of years old. Ottoman Empire, Persian Empire and so on. They were civilised when Western Europe was uncivilised, going through the Dark Ages. So the idea that they cannot do self-determination is just nonsense.

Somebody mentioned that the Iranian people would like the West to butt in. Actually, no. There has just been a funeral. 40 million people attended. I am no fan of the mullahs, by the way. If you start attacking a country, you are going to create nationalism. The whole country now is behind Iran, because they want to protect their own country. And also, everybody in Iran knows that Israel is an apartheid state. It is committing genocide, ethnic cleansing. It has bombed Gaza to the Stone Age, and that is what it wants to do to Iran. So for Iran it is an existential crisis. That is why they are resisting. When the Nazis invaded us, we responded. They called us terrorists, but we were just responding to attacks.

Again, this narrative of waves of aggression coming out of the Middle East. This is a response to colonialism. They have been subjugated, their resources stolen, certainly for the best part of the twentieth century. Again, this notion of the unstable empires. These have been around for thousands of years. Ottoman Empire, Persian Empire and so on. This notion that we would like to interfere to sustain peace, no.

Mossadegh has been mentioned. A democratically elected leader was overthrown. We funded, we were on the Iraqi side against the Iranians. So somebody mentioned that we have not been interfering in Iran. We have been interfering all the time. The Iran-Iraq war. It is just, look, it is colonialism. They want to bomb it back to the Stone Age. That is why they are responding. They would like the opportunity to be masters of their own destiny, if only the West would stay out. Thank you.

The vote

So the motion is: the West should leave the Middle East to its own devices. Well, we have a very clear result, not one that I was expecting, to be honest with you. So, with three for the motion, 13 opposed the motion and one abstention, this house does not believe the West should leave the Middle East to its own devices.