



Main policy issues from the 1st Free –Discussion in Peterborough on UK Foreign Policy in the Middle East.

- 1 The UK's foreign policy on Israel is that it must withdraw to the 1967 borders, and that east Jerusalem will be the capital of the Palestinian State.

Any permanent structures that either the Israelis or the Palestinians build must reflect the UN Resolutions that the 1967 borders and the position of east Jerusalem are sacrosanct

- 2 There is at least some contradiction in the UK policy which has recognised the re-election of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan despite the alleged proof of large scale fraud in the last election and yet the current Iranian Government is regarded as lacking a mandate because of the same allegations.

These examples create a perception that our Government has what will be termed as 'double standards' for treating 2 neighbouring countries in very different ways by supporting one and condemning the other. Notwithstanding the concerns about the freedom of choice in both Iran and Afghanistan, the UK's neutrality in taking up such contradictory positions often severely damaged our reputation of even-handedness and creates the impression of bias and lack of independence from that of the USA government.

Another example was the fact that both Iran and Israel have nuclear weapons; there was a general view that our Government's stance was not even handed because it condemned one and was silent about the other. These two positions were seen as contradictory and perceived as biased.

- 3 Our Government was apparently taken completely by surprise when Hamas won the last elections in Palestine, having instigated the elections in the first place, which were recognised by the international community scrutineers as being fair, open and democratic.

But because Hamas won the elections rather than the PLO, the UK government was seen as condemning the Palestinians of making the wrong choice!!

- 4 Similarly, concern was expressed that our own Government was one of the few in the world who did not condemn the invasion of Lebanon when Mr Blair was the PM, and this again damaged the UK's stance of being even handed in the Middle East and of following the USA stance in the region.

- 5 There was a general consensus that violent extremism was influenced by our foreign policy in the Middle East and that the government was making extra efforts to listen to the views of all sections and all faiths in our society.

- 6 There was a shared belief that it was increasingly important to convey the views of all sections of the public on any concerns about any aspect of our Government's policies on the Middle East, and that this ought to be done by writing to Ministers, civil servants, MPs, etc. There was also a general recognition that this did not happen often enough and effectively enough at the moment.

- 7 On the questions of sanctions, there appeared to be a general divergence of opinion; the Foreign Office view that sanctions did not work did not convince the audience, who drew upon examples of sanctions against South Africa's apartheid policies and sanctions in place today against various countries at the moment, such as Zimbabwe, etc.