

The Hustings

Sample questions for meetings with candidates

The following questions are suggested for meetings with parliamentary candidates. We don't expect you to ask them all. Pick the ones that best reflect your concerns.

Many of the questions are open-ended, to give candidates an opportunity to express their opinions and to start a discussion. For some questions, background is given.

Do let us know what answers you receive.

War and violence

1. The United Nations Charter begins, "We, the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war ..."

If elected, what would you do to abolish war?

2. Under international law, countries may resort to the use of force only in self-defence or on the authority of the United Nations Security Council.

Would you agree that there is never a justification except in these two cases for a country's use of violence?

3. Governments have the principal role in setting the moral tone of politics. If a government uses violence that is not UN mandated and not genuinely defensive, it seems reasonable to expect that others - whether states or extremist groups - will feel free to do the same.

Does this seem to you a plausible connection to make between violence used in foreign policy - and terrorism?

4. Despite abundant evidence to the contrary, many people believe that violence and war are intrinsic to human nature.

Do you?

5. Despite abundant evidence to the contrary, many people believe that violence and war are intrinsic to international relations.

Do you?

The abolition of war

6. We in the Movement for the Abolition of War believe that the abolition of war is possible and urgent, and that that goal *should inform and guide all that this country and others do.*

Just as colonialism, slavery and men-only suffrage were once regarded as normal, but are now rejected by most people as being incompatible with basic moral standards - so also, we believe that war is an institution that will and should follow the same way out. People will look back with incredulity at a modern world, claiming to be civilised, that could not deal with its differences without resorting to the barbaric methods of previous centuries. But this will not happen unless:

- we rid ourselves of false assumptions about human nature and international relations (kept alive by those who have an interest in war and those unable to think beyond convention)
- we refuse as a country to go to war, and refuse as citizens to be misled by propaganda for going to war, and so do not give others reasons to engage in war and prepare for it, except -
- in genuine self-defence, or as part of United Nations authorised action that is under the control and organisation of the United Nations.

Would you like to join us?

The UK, Parliament and war

7. The decision whether or not to use violence in international affairs is the most serious a government can take.

Do you agree that it should never be taken without the approval of Parliament?

8. Since 1998, the UK has gone to war four times - against Yugoslavia, against Afghanistan, against Iraq and against Libya.

Do you think the outcomes have been beneficial for those countries and their citizens?

The first duty of a government is the safety of its citizens. Have these wars made UK citizens safer?

9. (For Labour and Conservative candidates) Millions marched against the Iraq war before it began, and the war is now generally held to have been a disastrous mistake, as well as being morally and legally indefensible. In Parliament, your party voted for the UK to go to war.

Do you think that it would be appropriate for your party now to make a public apology for its part in the Iraq war?

International organisation

10. The United Nations is the only universal international organisation we have. It offers the possibility of building a world based on law and cooperation. The UK is one of five permanent members of its Security Council, giving it special responsibility within the UN. Yet in recent years the UK has taken a leading part in illegal attacks on four countries:

- in 1999 – NATO’s illegal bombing of Yugoslavia
- in 2001 – the US/UK’s illegal invasion of Afghanistan
- in 2003 – the US/UK’s illegal invasion of Iraq
- in 2011, when the UK, US and their allies continued bombing Libya until the Gaddafi regime collapsed, taking UN Security Council resolution 1973 well beyond the understanding of two permanent members of the Security Council, Russia and China.

All this was illegal because it was all done without the sanction of the UN Security Council.

Many people feel that this record of the UK’s is a shameful one, that can only undermine the UN and international law, and put at grave risk our long-term interest in a peaceful world.

What is your opinion?

11. Do you think that the UN has an important role to play in international relations? Do you think the UK should give it more importance in its foreign policy?

12. Between the members of the European Union, war has become unthinkable. But the European Commission’s pursuit of neo-liberal economic policies is setting member state against member state and alienating large sections of the public. It would seem vital that the Commission and the Council are made representative of the European electorate, genuinely responsible and accountable to it through the European Parliament.

What do you think? If you agree, how should this be done?

13. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has 57 member states from Europe, Asia and North America, including Russia and the US. Its mandate includes arms control, good governance, human rights, conflict prevention, management and resolution, post-conflict rehabilitation, media freedom, and the environment.

It is currently has an important role in the monitoring of the conflict in Ukraine.

Should not the government be giving it greater importance and funding?

Nuclear weapons

14. Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968), which the UK has signed, says: "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament ..."

The proposed renewal of Trident would violate this commitment.

What is your position on Trident?

15. Many commentators on the idea of nuclear deterrence see it as having offensive as well as defensive uses. In some circumstances, the argument goes, it can give a country a sense - or an illusion - of security sufficient for it to feel safe attacking another, or for it to escalate conflict.

It seems clear that a consequence of the UK's possession of nuclear weapons, and of our leaders' belief in nuclear deterrence, has been an aggressive foreign policy, and that we are now paying the price with terrorism and an obsession with internal security.

What do you think?

16. While the Cold War is now history, the US and Russia still possess huge numbers of nuclear weapons, and continue to develop and deploy them. In October, the Arms Control Association, a US think tank, reported that the deployed strategic nuclear arsenals of both countries had increased significantly in the previous six months.

If elected, what will you do to get this trend reversed?

17. Depleted uranium (DU) weapons have been used in Iraq, Yugoslavia and possibly elsewhere. At least 20 countries are thought to have them. The weapons aerosol a fine dust of particles that remain radioactive for millions of years. If inhaled or ingested the particles lodge in tissues and irradiate the same small area constantly. The dust can be blown 100s if not 1000s of miles.

The US and the UK fired 404,000 kg of DU in Iraq, and the US fired 6,994 kg in Yugoslavia. The weapons are thought to be responsible for Gulf War Syndrome among veterans and the huge rise in cancers and birth deformities in southern Iraq. The use of these weapons is a danger to us all, wherever we are - for ever.

The Campaign Against Depleted Uranium campaigns in the UK for a ban on DU weapons, and there is now an All Party Parliamentary group on Depleted Uranium.

If elected, will you join it?

18. One of a UK Prime Minister's first tasks on entering office - the most important thing that he or she will ever do - is to write personal letters to the captains of each of the four Trident submarines, instructing them as to whether or not they should fire their missiles in the event that the government is destroyed by a nuclear attack. What the Prime Minister writes is known only to himself or herself.

What would you write?

19. For many people, the UK government's policy since the Second World War of defending the country and our political system with the threat of incinerating millions of people with nuclear weapons is morally abhorrent.

What is your position?

20. Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968) says,

"Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith ... on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

Disarmament no longer seems to be on the international agenda. Bearing in mind the nuclear arsenals that Russia and the US still possess, the existence now of 9 states possessing nuclear weapons, and the violent conflicts taking place now in the Middle East and elsewhere, do you think it should be on the agenda?

The arms trade

21. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, in 2013 the UK was the 5th biggest arms exporter.

The world is awash with arms, and yet we continue to sell them. We sell them to some of the most authoritarian and repressive regimes. We sell them, seemingly unconcerned that - around the world - we risk increasing political distrust, tension and conflict. We cannot even guarantee that our arms won't end up in the hands of extremist groups, terrorists and criminals. It is high time we put an end to this evil trade.

What will you do about it?

22. The UN Arms Trade Treaty, of which the UK is a signatory, entered into force in December 2014. According to the Campaign Against the Arms Trade, the UK had an important role in pushing for the treaty.

The treaty is intended to regulate arms sales, not to reduce them. In fact, it affirms the sovereign right of any state to conventional arms and recognises the interests a state may have in trading them.
(continued overleaf)

Isn't it time we stopped using the 'right to self-defence' of every state as an excuse for our arms industry to make money?

Climate chaos and war

23. Climate change is one of the greatest threats to humanity. One of its consequences will be to increase the likelihood of war through competition over food and water, as a result of land made uninhabitable or unproductive.

The reverse is also true: war is a cause of climate change. War creates huge insecurity and distrust globally, stimulates the production and purchase of arms at vast expense and cost in carbon generation, and undercuts any attempt at international agreement – especially agreement that would restrict war-associated industries.

If elected, will you make action on climate change and the abolition of war your highest priorities?

Oil and war

24. The struggle to control sources of oil is widely seen as a cause of tension and war in the Middle East and elsewhere, and of the West's support of authoritarian regimes such as Saudi Arabia.

If elected, what policies would you support to reduce the UK's dependence on oil?

25. As Arctic ice recedes, competition is developing between countries and companies for access to oil in the Arctic.

What would you do to stop this and protect the Arctic?

Middle East

26. On 15 February 2003, two million of your fellow citizens marched in London to protest against the planned war against Iraq.

Were you among them? If not, do you think you should have been?

27. Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank and blockade of Gaza, its oppression of the Palestinians, and its violation of many UN resolutions relating to Israel-Palestine relations, has been a continual cause of conflict in the Middle East.

If elected, what would you do about it?

28. Approaches to the war in Syria almost always involve more arms and more bombing.

What *non-violent* approaches do you propose to help bring the war in Syria to an end?

29. ISIS films its murders and broadcasts them. The US murders people with drones, unseen.

Do you think there is a moral distinction?

Western foreign policy

30. The crisis in Ukraine threatens a direct conflict between nuclear-armed states - NATO members and Russia - and is the most serious East-West confrontation since the Cold War. While Russia clearly has considerable responsibility for the crisis, we should also take into account Russia's history and recent Western behaviour.

Russia has been invaded from the West twice in the 20th century. In the Second World War the Soviet Union's death toll was 20 million. It is widely accepted that the continued occupation of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union after the Second World War was principally to secure its western borders.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO expanded to the East, 11 of its new members being former Warsaw Pact countries, several of them bordering Russia - despite an understanding between the US, West Germany and Gorbachev in 1990 that NATO would not expand to the East. Even though the understanding was not a written one, Russian anxiety on the issue was clear.

Russia has always opposed Ukraine joining NATO. Out of Russia's neighbours, Ukraine has one of the longest borders with Russia. Even so, NATO has encouraged Ukraine to become a member. A month after the Ukrainian revolution in February 2014, which made NATO membership likely, Russia illegally annexed Crimea, home of its Black Sea navy. Russia's subsequent behaviour in Ukraine, however deplorable, clearly reflects its historic anxiety about its Western border.

Western criticism of Russia's illegal behaviour should be compared with the four illegal wars the West has pursued in the last 15 years: Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya - wars that have killed hundreds of thousands, with dreadful and lasting consequences.

Many people abhor the behaviour and hypocrisy of Russia and the West over Ukraine. That of Russia is at least understandable in terms of a concern - security - that most people recognise.

What do you think about this?

31. If Russia's behaviour over Ukraine is motivated by security concerns, it is unlikely to give in to Western demands. If the West persists, and the US transfers arms to Ukraine, as it is proposing to do, the confrontation could escalate to dangerous levels.

However, some people have talked of the danger of 'appeasement'.

Bearing in mind that both sides have huge nuclear arsenals, would you, if elected, urge the government

- not to appease Russia, or
- to negotiate and compromise with Russia, even if this means reducing support for Ukraine, or
- to involve the UN and the OSCE, or
- to try some combination of these?

32. In recent years, NATO and the West have gone to war in deliberate violation of international law on three occasions (Yugoslavia 1999, Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003), and prolonged a war in deliberate violation of international law on a fourth (Libya 2011) - with disastrous results.

Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN at the time of the bombing of Yugoslavia, commented in his annual report that the NATO action represented a threat to the "very core of the international security system" founded on the UN Charter. The same may be said of the other attacks. War licences other countries and groups to take the law into their own hands - as we now see in the Middle East, Africa and Ukraine, where people are incensed at the behaviour of the West, or are taking the opportunity of the chaos the West has caused.

What will you do to ensure that the UK's criminal behaviour abroad is stopped?

33. In 2010, Baroness Manningham-Buller, Director General of M15, 2002-07, said that the decision to go to war against Iraq "radicalised a whole generation of young people, some of them British citizens who saw our involvement in Iraq, on top of our involvement in Afghanistan, as being an attack on Islam."

Do you think that this helps us understand the rise of terrorism?

34. The idea of humanitarian intervention, so-called, has been used by some in the UK to rationalise its illegal wars, on the grounds that we democracies cannot be prevented doing what we think is right by the authoritarian members of the UN Security Council, Russia and China, and that sovereignty should not trump human rights.

Other people think that this is national, military or commercial interest dressed up for public acceptability, or a naïve idealism that is bound to fall foul of vested interests. Many hold that it is folly to believe that violence does not have its own unpredictable and probably tragic consequences, quite at odds with the original aim.

What do you think?

Economy and poverty

35. Austerity policies drive poor people to desperation and promote extremist parties of right and left. The parties on the right are the kind that led Europe into the Second World War.

If elected, would you pursue alternative policies to those of austerity?

36. World production and trade are largely organised to exploit poor countries and to protect rich countries. The more people are denied a livelihood and a stake in the global economy, the more their discontent is likely to be translated into violence.

What policies do you support that counteract this impoverishment and redress international inequalities?

Militarism, education and advertising

37. In 2009, Michael Gove said, "We will develop a Troops to Teachers programme - to get the professionals in the army who know how to train young men and women into the classroom where they can provide not just discipline, but inspiration and leadership."

What do you think of this? Do you think it is right for the army to be involved in schools?

38. Public recruitment for the armed forces usually stresses glamour, excitement, outdoor activity. The barbaric realities of war, and its results in death, injury and suffering, are never mentioned.

Do you think it is right for the state to engage in such grossly misleading advertising?

Entertainment and violence

39. The prevalence of violence and war in films, computer games, fiction and even children's books has the effect of normalising it, justifying it, even glorifying it. The good guy wins in the end, and everyone is grateful and happy.

What do you think of this culture of violence and war?

If elected, how would you try to counteract it?

40. Men's magazines generally represent masculinity in terms of force, ruthlessness, machismo, invulnerability, invincibility, and represent any activity or endeavour as 'fighting' or 'battle'. Small boys are encouraged in our culture to think of the world in terms of superheroes, good guys and bad guys, and of killing the bad guys.

What do you think of this and what can be done about it?

Remembrance

41. From 2014 to 2018, people throughout Europe are marking the tragedy and the disaster of the First World War.

If elected, how will you work to ensure that we never again go to war?

42. While we remember the First World War, we should remember too the many other wars that have taken place subsequently. Although, like the First World War, they are now facts of history, and so give the illusion of inevitability, we should also remember that politicians began them as a matter of choice.

In recent times, politicians have made the same choice.

What would you do to ensure that that choice is not made?

43. War leads frequently to acts of atrocity, acts inexcusable even in warfare. In the Second World War, Britain fire-bombed German cities, in Vietnam the US napalmed villages, in Iraq, Britain and the US used depleted uranium weapons.

Do you agree that genuine acts of remembrance include recognition of such wrong-doing on our part, and apology, and as far as possible, reparation?

44. In modern warfare, many more civilians are killed than military. But remembrance ceremonies normally focus only on the military who have died.

How would you rectify that imbalance?

45. Remembrance ceremonies are often national, with the implication that only our suffering matters. But the tragedy of war is international.

Many people feel that remembrance ceremonies in which government officials take part should be conducted internationally, bringing former enemies together equally.

What do you think?

46. What do you do in remembrance of war?

Martin Aitken