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COMMENT**Clowns can be sinister**

IN this column yesterday, we highlighted the dangers of racial generalisation after a Muslim man was reported to have been asked to get off a bus in Bristol because other passengers complained that he looked "shifty" and was carrying bulky luggage.

The terrorists will have won if we are blinkered and stupid enough to blame all Muslims for atrocities, is the gist of what we said.

Cue Donald Trump.

The Republican presidential hopeful promptly declared that it was time all Muslims were banned from entering the US "until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on".

He went on to suggest that cities such as London were afflicted with "radicalised" no-go areas where police feared for their lives.

So there we are – to blinkered and stupid, we can add repugnant.

Mr Trump is a clown but a highly dangerous clown. His words will inevitably fuel hate crimes somewhere down the line because, sadly, there are other dangerous clowns who will think he's right.

And that is exactly what the terrorists want – to stir up racial violence.

It is rare for a British Prime Minister to comment on the activities and declarations of American presidential candidates but Mr Trump represents an exception to the rule and David Cameron is right to have joined the chorus of condemnation, branding his comments as "divisive, unhelpful and quite simply wrong".

But our favourite comment came from the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, who rose to the occasion splendidly by announcing: "The only reason I wouldn't go to some parts of New York is the real risk of meeting Donald Trump."

We can only hope that the American people see sense.

What do you think?
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QUALITY

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Make peace, not war



WARFARE: A Tornado GR4 taking part in British bombing runs over Syria on the runway at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus

Picture: NICK ANSELL/PA WIRE

AM willing to accept that the MPs who voted for the UK to join a bombing campaign did so because they believe it is right; that it will protect people in the UK and pave the way to peace in Syria. The problem is they are wrong.

Bombing Syria is not the right action. The bombing will kill innocent civilians. We know this because it has in every single air campaign ever carried out.

In order to be effective in reducing collateral damage, the missiles will have to strike their intended targets. Not only is that impossible to guarantee, it is also heavily-reliant on on-the-ground intelligence, which in Libya led to the systematic bombing of schools, universities, houses and hospitals.

This should be enough to make us pause, but to make matters worse our actions may in fact significantly strengthen the enemy we are hoping to defeat.

The United States has been bombing IS positions in Syria since September 2014, some 14 months ago. France has been bombing the same region for eight months. Russia began its own campaign at the end of September – though only 10 per cent of its attacks so far have been launched against IS. In that time IS has lost just 10 per cent of the land it had snatched and has actually increased its activities in other states.

Bombing IS positions in Syria has failed. Meanwhile, now we are engaged in bombing IS, we are effectively recruiting for it.

IS can only exist as a participant in warfare, with clear enemies and threats to it and those it claims to represent. It recruits by presenting itself as the sole realistic opponent to a series of powerful states it claims aim to abuse their global power.

Prime Minister David Cameron has argued UK security would be improved by an air campaign on IS in Syria and this was a factor in many politicians' decisions. But the massacre in Paris has proven that bombing IS does not guarantee security from IS. Mr Cameron's claim simply does not stand up to basic logic, or recent experience.

The question is what should we do instead?



The recent decision by MPs to bomb cities in IS occupied Syria is a missed opportunity for peace and could lead to a potentially endless war, says commentator **Rory O'Keeffe**

If we look at the places IS is strongest they are Yemen, Libya, Iraq and Syria. These are all states in which the state has failed or is failing, where war is taking place on the streets and in the skies, where government no longer exists.

IS simply does not have any power anywhere else. It requires the chaos of failed states and warfare in order to operate.

It cannot withstand the power of organised government and proper policing. So, although it seems counter-intuitive, the way we defeat IS is by delivering peace and order. From there we can and will eradicate IS.

The Syrian Civil War has pitted several rebel forces, backed by a number of interested international parties, against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. He also is backed by a number of states, most notably, Russia and Iran. Assad's backers have so far managed to stifle every single attempt to call a ceasefire or an end to the war, but in fact matters are less complicated by this than they first appear.

Assad survives not only because of Iranian and Russian backing, but because he is loyally supported by the Alawite population in Syria. But a large part of the reason for this is because Syria's Alawites fear reprisals if the Free Syrian Army rebels take power.

The solution to this is a promise a new Syr-

ian government will offer full and sensible representation to all ethnic and religious groups, guaranteed in the same constitutional document which would also guarantee Alawites safety from 'reprisals' or other violence. This would not only significantly reduce President Assad's support in Syria, weakening his position to the point at which he could not continue to fight, but it also has the potential to placate Russia and Iran.

Not only can Assad not survive as leader without support from within, sensible and measured constitutional guarantees would also reduce objections from his main international allies. That is a plan which could work. And from there we could eradicate IS far more easily.

Instead, we have entered a campaign without any 'get-out' and are fated to keep bombing Syria for an extraordinarily long time. Syrian people in Syria don't want this bombing, Syrian people in the UK oppose it, the majority of the UK population is against it and NATO military experts and our own experience says it won't work.

We have committed ourselves to a potentially endless war in a state and a region which simply needs and deserves peace.

■ Rory O'Keeffe is a journalist and the author of *The Toss of a Coin: Voices From a Modern Crisis*, which is available from Amazon.

'IS requires the chaos of failed states and warfare in order to operate'

Rory O'Keeffe