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GENERAL SIR MIKE JACKSON DEFENDS HIS PART IN THE AMALGAMATION OF SCOTTISH REGIMENTS

Career soldier General Sir Mike Jackson spoke of his experiences in conflicts from Northern Ireland to Iraq in a packed event at the Edinburgh International Book Festival this afternoon. He talked of balancing political and military aims, and said that he believed that political problems cannot be solved by military means.

He called Bosnia an “ugly, dirty war” and spoke about the pattern of military intervention that has developed since the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union and believed that the success of British military intervention in Kosovo convinced the British Government that such action was not only possible, but could be a powerful tool and that the “Brits were good at it”.

Asked about his part in the amalgamation of the Scottish infantry regiments, he commented that he thought “Many a Scots pin has been stuck in the Jackson effigy” but defended the decision saying that the Treasury had insisted in a cut of 18 Battalions from a total strength of 40. He was aware that the changes had been very painful and emotional, particularly in Scotland, however it was necessary to create a system of large, multi-battalion regiments where soldiers could move between battalions without suffering any sort of identity crisis. A concession deliberately made by the Army Board was to allow the old regimental names to come in front of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, in the knowledge of the particular tribal strength of the Scottish regiments.

Answering a member of the audience’s question as to why Britain has not intervened in Zimbabwe, he said that he thought what was happening in Zimbabwe was outrageous, but not as outrageous as events in the Balkans. He said that although he believed a military action would be successful, he very much doubted that politically it was possible, commenting that to many Africans Mugabe is still seen as the man who finally put the boot into the white backside, and intervention from a predominantly white, and British, military force even for the very best of motives, would be a political nightmare.

The Book Festival continues until Monday 25th August.