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To be staying in the United States at this time is to experience a strange mood of puzzlement and anger as to how the foreign and security establishment in America should react to ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). The title for the organisation is at least for the present a reality – for they do control substantial territory in both Syria and Iraq. The question is for how long?

Yesterday the *Wall Street Journal* had an article by Dick Cheney and his daughter headlined ‘The collapsing Obama doctrine’. It demonstrated in every line that the former Vice President has learnt nothing from the debacle of his own judgements over the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In its vehemence and its partisanship it is below the level one should expect. In its simplicities it echoes the ill-advised words of our former Prime Minister, Tony Blair. Both men are incapable of accepting any responsibility for the mess the region is in. At least Cheney no longer holds any office. President George Bush wisely continues to show a decent respect for his successor as President, keeping his thoughts to himself as part of a dignified retirement. Blair by contrast assumes he must play a major role.

I find amongst many Americans that Tony Blair’s words are thought to represent the European Union. When I point out that he speaks only for the Quartet, a combination of the EU, US, Russia and the UN on the limited mandate of developing the economy of Palestine, they appear very surprised, thinking he is a Middle East envoy for the whole region. They also seem to think that the UK automatically supports Blair's views as well as the EU's on the military coup in Egypt and the present leaders. This is, of course, far from the truth. A letter from William Hague to me makes it clear that on this issue of Egypt and the unilateral bombing of Iran

Tony Blair speaks only for himself. Certainly judging from the situation in America Tony Blair should no longer be allowed to speak for the EU on the Middle East and someone else found for helping Palestine without his past record and crusading messianic fervour.

A different and more important article also appeared yesterday in the *New York Times* by Anne Marie Slaughter headlined 'Don't fight in Iraq and ignore Syria'. She was Director of Policy Planning in the State Department from 2009-2011. She has been a consistent advocate of using force in Syria. She believes that the reason the White

House did not act militarily over Syria was that no matter how heart-rendering the images and how horrific the crimes, America's vital interests were not engaged it was just people. Whereas in Iraq she believes, in contrast to Syria, the strategic world of government interests are involved "where what matters is the chess game of one leader against another, and stopping both state and non state actors who are able to harm the United States."

The danger of her analysis is that military intervention around the world when faced by humanitarian disasters can delay as well as speed up the establishment of peace. Many have never been convinced that military action from the air in Syria will do anything other than perpetuate and indeed exacerbate an already horrendous humanitarian crisis.

The arguments for this viewpoint are not trivial. I strongly supported the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya. But even that intervention has run into huge difficulties. It started however with a UN Security Council resolution that was not vetoed by either Russia or China. Because both countries believed, rightly or wrongly, that we broke the inhibition in the resolution on regime change they were never prepared to support in the UN military intervention from the air over Syria. Also even had such an

intervention taken place it would not have stopped all flights over Syria. With Russian and Iranian military advising and supporting the Assad government, not only would all the ground- to-air missile defence systems have been difficult to destroy but they would have been replenished. The fighting would not have stopped in the way that it did in Libya. And the belief that on the ground inter-ethnic and religious fighting can be stopped from the air would have been shown up as a myth fostered by too glib assumptions from the Balkans, particularly Kosovo.

There were and still are other problems associated with intervention in Syria. There has been an understandable difference of opinion in the past over whether to supply sophisticated armament to the Sunni forces fighting Assad. For Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region there was a readiness to supply to both moderate Sunni forces and Islamic extremist forces, but this option was not available to the US and the EU. We remembered with some regrets that by supplying the Mujahideen in Afghanistan with sophisticated weaponry to help oust the Soviet Union from 1979 onwards those same weapons, when they passed into the hands of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, were used against ourselves.

These and many other factors led to the House of Commons in August of last year rejecting on a cross party basis the idea that the British government should intervene militarily in Syria. When a few days later President Obama put the same issue to the US Congress it quickly became apparent without a vote that they too were not prepared

to take responsibility for such military action. What is democracy if it does not mean taking note of democratic legislatures of two important countries. The truth is that military intervention in Syria was rejected democratically.

However, no one can deny that the geo-strategic situation has changed dramatically with ISIS forces now controlling the Iraqi

cities of Fallujah, Tikrit, Mosul and Tel Afar.

First, it is possible to envisage now that the UN Security Council might agree to some military action to restore the territorial integrity of Iraq and Syria if for no other reason than the Iraqi government of Prime Minister al-Maliki has openly requested military support.

Secondly, it is already a fact that President Obama has authorised discussions to be undertaken with Iran following the open invitation from President Rouhani and that though this has aroused inevitable criticism from Senator McCain that criticism has not been replicated by other significant Republican Senators who are prepared at least to wait and see if there is a new way forward. The British government has also wisely taken the opportunity to re-establish an Ambassador in our Embassy in Teheran.

If we can start to cooperate with Iran on strategic problems facing Iraq it will be inevitable that we will also have to discuss the implications for Syria. There can be no solution that ignores Syria and it may even have to involve military action, such as drones and conventional aircraft. President Obama and David Cameron are right to exclude boots on the ground. Were the US and even NATO to take limited military action in the present circumstances it would be very different from any action that took place in the Iraq war or was contemplated to be taken in Syria. It would be action from outside the region that carried regional support from all the major players and might well have the endorsement of the UN. That is why it is imperative that Turkey, a NATO ally, helps guide the policy of European countries on whether we should be ready to offer NATO support in addition to anything that might come from the US.

United diplomatic and military action has a real chance of unifying not dividing the region. It would not be seen primarily as intervention from outside but of outside reinforcement. The leaders

who would have the most to lose if they failed to respond creatively to the new situation would be al-Malaki and Assad. The overall prize - and it is a very big one - is to achieve the destruction of ISIS, who in many ways are a more horrendous opponent than Al-Qaeda.

Just as it is vital that there is pressure from Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia on Prime Minister al-Malaki to build a proper coalition representative of his country with the full

involvement of the Sunni, Shia and Kurdish citizens, so it is vital for those three countries to exert the same pressure on President Assad to come up with a negotiated settlement with the moderate Sunni forces that are fighting with government forces in an ever futile civil war. These people have lived together and they can do so again. But Assad will have to recognise just as al-Malaki may have to that their past record excludes them from providing the healing leadership that is essential if Iraq and Syria are to be held together as stable countries within their present boundaries.