



AN OPEN LETTER

26th September 2014

Rt Hon David Cameron MP

Dear David,

You are absolutely right to say that ISIL is a vile movement that uses revolting medieval tactics to further its ambitions. It is extremely dangerous and a real threat not only to peace in the Middle East, but also to security here at home. They preach poisonous ideology and follow a totally warped version of Islam. They seek to destroy any and all that disagree with them. They have murdered Kurds and Christians by the hundreds. They have already beheaded two Americans and one Briton in hideous displays of televised carnage. They are out to destroy everything they can.

Now you seek to join President Obama in “degrading” their military machine and ultimately destroying them. I have no dispute with that motive. But I seriously doubt the means you intend to deploy.

Bombing always causes destruction but rarely, if ever, wipes out the human spirit. Hitler blitzed British cities in the belief that it would bring our nation to its knees. The opposite happened. Instead we became even more determined to resist.

We already know from bitter experience of the last Gulf War that today’s clever armaments are not as pinpoint accurate as their makers would claim. Cruise missiles go astray. Drones don’t always hit their targets.

The enemy will react as cunning enemies always do – by deliberately concealing themselves and dispersing among the civilian population. It is already happening in the ISIL dominated Syrian city of Raqqa. American missiles and fighter jets have been trying to strike military installations. They will certainly have caused a great deal of damage and many deaths. But the enemy isn’t stupid. The enemy has gone to ground.

Look at Israel’s experience in Gaza. Bombing frequently causes what we have come to know as collateral damage. Innocent people are killed, maimed and made homeless. The inevitable aftermath of aerial bombardment makes for compelling television news footage - weeping widows, injured children. The faces of such suffering act as compelling recruiting sergeants for tomorrow’s terrorists.

In this respect I fear we have wilfully underestimated ISIL. They have proved themselves to be extraordinary fighters. 30,000 Iraqi soldiers were completely routed at Mosul last year by a few thousand ISIL men. This is why ISIL now have so many US rifles, humvees and tanks.

Not that ISIL is short of money. Wealthy donors from Saudi Arabia and Qatar have helped it grow. ISIL has also mastered the mysteries of social media. Those ghastly execution videos were professionally made and distributed with clinical efficiency worldwide.

It is a British man wielding the knife, one of hundreds who signed up from our country. There are American jihadists fighting too, and Australians. We have allowed this organisation to develop and spread its tentacles right across the west.

I do not believe we can destroy such a well-oiled mass movement with bombs. Every modern conflict I can think of that has begun with bombing (and the promise that bombing alone will be sufficient). They always end with boots on the ground.

You say that will not happen in this case. But you admit our involvement may last for years. How many years?

You say that we will only be active against ISIL in Iraq. Yet there are already bombs falling in Syria. Surely this action could spread in ways that can only be guessed at?

I am uneasy about it all. I reluctantly supported a military campaign against Saddam Hussein on the strength of fears that the dictator held weapons of mass destruction. We all now know that the Downing Street dossier was based on false information.

You are not in Tony Blair's mould. I genuinely trust your sincerity. But there must be a better way to deal with ISIL than hoping to obliterate the organisation from the air.

We have given a great deal of humanitarian aid to those displaced by the conflict. We are offering practical help to the Pashmerga Kurdish fighters – night vision aids, communications kit, body armour. We are right to be doing these things. We should do more.

We could also, in the name of civilised sanity, work with all our allies to stop ISIL exploiting social media. If the Chinese government can jam the internet to exclude so many Western things it is very hard to believe that such skills are beyond the wit of British and American web experts.

Short of bombing there is much we could do, can do and should do to help undermine ISIL. I will back you to the hilt if you pursue these goals, but for the moment.....sorry.....I abstain.

A handwritten signature consisting of three stylized, cursive letters: 'R', 'L', and 'L'. The letters are written in black ink on a light-colored, textured paper background.