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**‘After “The decade of war”’**

by

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*Born in 1965, David Miliband was educated at Oxford and MIT, before joining the Institute for Public Policy Research. He became Head of Policy for Tony Blair, then leader of the Labour Party, in 1994, and was Head of the Prime Minister’s Policy Unit from 1997-2001. He was elected in 2001 as a Member of Parliament for South Shields. After a year as a backbench MP, spells followed as Schools Minister, Minister of State for Communities and Local Government, and Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In 2007 he was promoted to Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the youngest for thirty years. After the General Election, and Labour leadership election, of 2010, he combined Chairmanship of the Commission on Youth Unemployment with teaching spells at MIT, Stanford and Harvard. He is Co-Chair with Trevor Manuel and Jose Maria Figueres of the Global Ocean Commission. He was selected as President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Rescue Committee, based in New York, on 27 March, and will take up his appointment later in the summer.*

I want to start a long way from here, in the Democratic Republic of Congo – one of the most war-torn places on earth. I heard about a group of film makers who have just returned after spending the last 18 months there. They said the following: “If you look at the facts and you don’t get desperate, you aren’t looking at the facts. If you look at the people and don’t get hopeful you aren’t looking at the people.”

Today I want to try and look at facts and people; at the problems of collective action on global problems, and the unrivalled opportunities now open to spread wealth and power; at the struggle for peace between peoples at a time when war between nations is less and less the norm. I will be seeking out general principles and lessons, while being conscious, thanks to the Chief Rabbi’s recent foray into the pages of Foreign Affairs, of Emerson’s dictum that “foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds”.

The lecture revolves around the conundrum that while western military intervention is for various reasons toxic, the economic and political alternatives in fragile states seem relatively weak. So the questions I want to address are whether the successor to a decade of war need be a decade of disorder, whether it matters to countries like the UK and US, and what can be done about it. There are three parts to what follows.

The first looks at the lessons from a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, through the lens of my own involvement in seeking to bring those conflicts to a close.

The second part is focussed on the conflict in Syria. While we have learnt in the last decade that western military intervention can trigger chaos, so we have seen in Syria that its absence can mean mayhem – and it is going to get worse before it gets better. Spurred by a recent visit to the region, I set out the pressing need for damage limitation, humanitarian and geopolitical.

The third part of the lecture then addresses the challenge of rethinking non-military options – economic interventions, diplomatic alliances and political strategies – given the dangers of strategic vacuum. In particular, it discusses the agenda for governments, NGOs and think tanks who gather under the ‘humanitarian’ banner.

The themes of the speech, from the divisions and gaps in the international system to the new geography of poverty in fragile states around the world, reflect the personal and professional transition I am making from my past life as a UK politician and policy maker to my future life as a US-based leader of a global NGO. As a politician I was trying to make the weather; the premium was on taking sides and projecting influence. In the future I will be trying to deal with the consequences of the political weather, asserting the humanitarian cause, and its principles, whose interest is the needs of the people.

It would be neat and tidy if the two worlds, political and humanitarian, were wholly separate. But of course they are not. The most challenging questions sit at the intersection of political decisions and humanitarian action. And just as politics shapes

humanitarian crises, so the most effective humanitarian work can reshape political choices.

Let me declare at the outset the binding thread, for me, between these two roles. I am an internationalist in my heart and my brain. I fear the absence of global cooperation more than its (un)democratic dangers. I see values of human dignity and social justice as universal not western. So from my point of view, it would be worse than an unfortunate irony if the prime authors of the current phase of global integration, we in the industrialised world, now baulked at its consequences and implications. While international engagement is decreasingly popular in the advanced democracies, the multipolar world makes it increasingly necessary, and that is what I want to explore today.

### **Context: Iraq and Afghanistan**

My starting point is January 20th this year. In his powerful second Inaugural Address President Obama said “the decade of war is now ending”. That is the reference in my title.

There were echoes of President Kennedy who in his famous speech to the American University shortly before his assassination in 1963 said: “This generation of Americans has already had enough – more than enough – of war and hate and oppression”. And of course the see-saw between nation-building at home and peace-building abroad has been a recurrent theme of American history. In fact, as Graham Allison recently pointed out, it has also been a recurrent theme in debate about how to handle the challenge of rising powers right back to ancient Athens.

The immediate context for the President’s statement, however, is specific and powerful. Iraq and Afghanistan have occupied American and other western troops for longer than World War 2, at enormous not to say inordinate cost, human, financial and political. And the longer we have been in these two countries, the less clear it has been not just who has won or even is winning, but also what winning looks like. Alliances shift, local politics intervenes, recent promises are trumped by old hatreds, my enemy’s enemy turns out to be mine too.

The two cases, Iraq and Afghanistan, are very different in important ways, but the combined effect of the toll in lives, money and political trust on foreign policy will be long-lasting and profound. Caution is an understandable reaction; isolationism, or what in the French Third Republic was called “attentisme”, waiting for something to turn up, is much more risky.

In Iraq, the war was won easily but the peace has often looked like war. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the threat from al Qaeda is much reduced, but the prospects for the country – including a new kind of civil war – after the exit of western troops hang in the balance. As Anthony Cordesman of CSIS recently

wrote: “Afghanistan will be a nation at war long beyond 2014”. As if the Afghan people have not suffered enough.

All of us who have been in politics in this period have been coloured by these events. I viewed the descent to war in Iraq from the security of the Department for Education where I was Minister for Schools. Yet it fell to me in 2007/8 to help choreograph the diplomatic and political side of the withdrawal of British troops from downtown Basra – as I arrived at the Foreign Office they were surrounded in Basra Palace – and indeed from Iraq as a whole. Ten years on, Saddam is gone, and the Kurds are safe, but the country is afflicted by violence and fissures. The overall reckoning is strongly negative. There were no WMD, and if we had known that in 2003 then there would have been no justification for war.

In respect of Afghanistan, I attended the Cabinet in 2005-2006 as Minister for Communities and Local Government as Ministers discussed the British move to Helmand Province. I remember arguments about money, equipment, drugs, and governance. But neglected was the main point – politics not troops. The politics of 40 000 villages and valleys; of a society where the state has no monopoly on violence; of complex tribal structures that cross national boundaries 100 years after their creation.

I spent a lot of time over my three years as Foreign Secretary trying to understand and engage with Afghanistan and Pakistan. I quickly realised that what actually mattered to military or development or diplomatic success was clarity about the design of a national and regional political settlement that could hold the ring for an Afghanistan in which all the tribes were in, Al Qaeda out and the neighbours outside. Nationally that meant going with the grain of Afghanistan’s decentralised ethnic and tribal structures. Regionally that meant recognising the stake of all the neighbours in Afghanistan, but insisting that it could be a client state of none of them. Without that vision, everything was backs-to-the-wall improvisation.

I advocated both secret and open dialogue with the insurgent groups, and a regional process that involved the Iranians and the Russians as well as the Indians and Pakistanis. The London Conference of 2010 gave some endorsement to these ideas, but in a way that lacked sufficient teeth or political buy-in. Prime Minister Gordon Brown was preoccupied with fighting off unfriendly (and unfair) fire from within the Ministry of Defence and sections of the press over military equipment. The international community was locked into a mindset and strategy that put defence, development, diplomacy and reconciliation in that order.

In fact, it was only after the announcement of an end date for Nato combat operations, or more precisely the increasing imminence of that date, that political negotiations have been given a really serious push.

Since beginning work on this lecture, the existence, purpose and status of the Taliban office in Qatar have hit the headlines. And of course far from our position to negotiate having been strengthened by military victories, it has been weakened by military stalemate.

So I have seen up close the failures that arise from over-reliance on military power and under-investment in politics and diplomacy. I understand too well the cautionary tales that are provided by these events. Four lessons are most important to me.

Lesson one is that clarity and legitimacy in post-conflict power sharing arrangements needs to be front and centre in any diplomatic or military endeavour overseas. Without that, peacebuilding or peacekeeping efforts will never succeed. Power-sharing is what a 'political settlement' means. It requires very careful thought about constitutional structures and guarantees, about Presidential versus Parliamentary systems of government, about centralised versus decentralised power. We can see what happens when there is no such vision in Syria today: there is nothing to bind opponents of the current regime, or tempt its adherents to switch sides. It is also relevant in places like Somalia and Mali.

Lesson two is that without the support of regional actors fragile states can never be stabilised. In other words the political settlement needs to be regional not just national. We refer to Iraq and Afghanistan as if they were self-contained, when the crises that they have been and become have their origins and consequences well beyond national borders. Afghanistan is after all a crisis of South Asia. The lesson is that the neighbours cannot be an afterthought. Again, there is obvious relevance around Africa as well as the Middle East.

The third lesson is that mobile terrorist groups add a whole new dimension to instability in fragile states through their ability to hijack local grievances. It was striking ten days ago to hear the Head of the UK Counter Terrorist Office highlight the terrorist threat to Britain from fighters training in Syria. The nationalities of foreign fighters killed in Syria, recently published, should be chilling for anyone who believes this conflict does not have ramifications for the rest of us. There is a very specific lesson about language. The phrase "war on terror" had the dangerous consequence of uniting under a single banner a series of disparate and sometimes localised grievances, when the opposite approach, fragmenting those committed to violence, would have been more appropriate.

We need to recognise that these failings in Iraq and Afghanistan – to secure the peace, create meaningful political dialogue and power sharing, and engage the regional players – have contributed to the international paralysis over how to protect the Syrian people and fostered diplomatic stalemate when the opposite is needed.

There is also a further point, not so much a lesson but a reflection. I think it was the Editor of the Financial Times who said that history books would record that the three most important words of the decade after 9/11 were not 'War on Terror' but 'Made in China'. It is a fact that while western defence and foreign policy has been consumed by Iraq and Afghanistan, (to the extent that western powers are for example now virtual absentees from UN peacekeeping missions), large parts of the world have been busy rebalancing the economic terms of trade. It wasn't a decade of war for them. It was actually a decade of peace and rising prosperity.

So there are economic as well as political reasons for western nations to be gun shy and to focus on the home front. However, the humanitarian community I am joining deals every day with the dangers of impunity, when governments (or their opponents) can kill or terrorise their own people, without effective reproach. We in humanitarian NGOs can try to stop the dying; we need politics to stop the killing.

We have seen these dangers in the last twenty years around the world. We now see them in stark relief in Syria. They raise very hard questions about the rights of citizens and the responsibilities of nations – responsibilities embraced in the idea of a 'Responsibility to Protect'. For me, the lessons of the last decade go beyond staying away.

### **Syria: The Challenge of Impunity**

I last visited the extraordinary city of Damascus in 2009. I paid my respects at the extraordinary, beautiful central mosque. I ate ice cream in the famous souk in the middle of town. I talked to religious and civic society leaders. I also met with President Assad for a couple of hours to talk about domestic reform, his alliance with Iran, and regional issues. There was courtesy and attentiveness, but also a strange set of blind spots every time difficult issues were raised – from human rights at home to the Iranian nuclear programme abroad. He professed puzzlement; questioned sources; resorted to generalities. We were offering cultural, economic and political engagement, but he was focussed on holding onto power.

Today, the organisation I am joining in September, the International Rescue Committee, is delivering life-saving help to some of the 4.7 million IDPs within Syria and 1.5 million refugees in the countries beyond. Let me set out what I have just heard and seen, on a visit to Jordan two weeks ago. A three day visit does not make for great depth, but it does allow for stories to be combined with data to produce a deeply alarming picture.

Inside Syria, IRC has talked to refugees who report life-threatening shortages of medicines, while food and fuel shortages are a daily reality. Doctors told me of colleagues (and relatives) who have been targeted, and killed, in the war. There are

allegations of truly horrific human rights abuse – in fact human abuse.

In addition to nearly 100 000 dead inside Syria, and countless more dying for lack of medical help, close to a third of the Syrian population have already been displaced, within the country or beyond. The refugee numbers in Jordan now amount to over 10 per cent of the population. That is the equivalent of the whole population of Romania moving to the UK, or the population of Poland moving to the US. In Lebanon the figure is closer to 15 per cent.

There are refugee camps in Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, but across the region the large majority of refugees are fending for themselves in urban areas. So there is tangible strain on host communities, consistent with the new pattern of refugee flows around the world, where some 60 per cent are in urban areas.

Two weeks ago, I sat with four families in a two room apartment (plus kitchen) in Mafraq in Northern Jordan, with around 15 children. There is immense pressure on local services, from schooling to rubbish disposal. Rents are being pushed up by landlords who know that there is some UN sponsored cash assistance available. Children are not allowed out, in part because the family explained that they have no money for anything they want to buy.

At a clinic for Syrian refugees, I heard mothers and widows talk about dead husbands and sons. Violence against women, detailed in IRC's January Report Syria: A Regional Crisis, is rife. A Bedouin family explained that the head of the family had been shot by a sniper while queuing for bread.

Traditionally, the political world and the humanitarian world are meant to occupy separate boxes. Politics was normative; humanitarian action was neutral. Yet the humanitarian toll in Syria is now as much part of the geopolitics as the balance of military power.

The scale of killing has created sectarian reprisals, not just in Syria but in Lebanon and Iraq. Meanwhile the extent of refugee flows is itself a source of destabilisation within the country and outside. And under any scenario, there are many more refugees to come – not least the 250-300 000 Syrians living up against the Jordanian border.

This makes the mismatch between the scale of need and the current levels of aid even more worrying. The UN has launched a massive appeal for humanitarian aid, the biggest this century, for work inside and outside Syria, but funding has only come in at about one third of this level. It is not as though we lack ideas of what to do, from running medical supplies across the border to aiding neighbouring states to pressuring both sides to allow humanitarian access. But there is a serious lack of resources in a conflict growing more complex by the day.

Western governments have called on President Assad to leave power since the summer of 2011, no doubt spurred by predictions from within the region that a Mubarak moment was coming. When I visited the Middle East twice at the beginning of 2012 the consensus was that President Assad would last weeks or at worst months. But obviously that was wrong. Since then, needs have grown and options diminished.

We know the conflict started with a small boy scrawling graffiti on a wall. It became a popular protest against the subsequent government crackdown. I still see the bulk of opposition to the regime as fundamentally nationalist in character. But what began as a follow up to the 2005 Damascus Declaration, the demand for openness and accountability in governance, has become a sectarian clash between different Syrian communities, an intra-regional proxy war and on the part of Russia a great power clash. Small wonder that a dissident artist quoted by the Economist called the conflict "a war in Syria but not a Syrian war".

We need to be honest with ourselves about how this clash is going, in geopolitical terms as well as humanitarian. It is not only his supporters who judge President Assad to be, and feel, more secure and confident than he was a year ago. The opposition, military and political, seems more fragmented, with over 1000 militias around the country, some of them fighting each other according to recent reports, while the Government and state machine has more or less held together. The greatest rebel gains in the last year have been made by radical jihadist groups, led by Jabhat as Nusrah, and there are serious allegations of abuse by the rebels. The sectarian clash is growing and spreading, and the chance of post-conflict stability and reconciliation receding with every death and injury. The leverage of the West is lower than a year ago. Iran, Russia and Hizbollah think they are winning.

Here is a key point. Many of the fears that tilted the balance of argument about Syria against western intervention – the growth of radical jihadism, the destabilisation of neighbouring countries, the igniting of sectarian tensions, the use of chemical weapons, the Balkanisation of the country into divided communities, the rise of Iranian influence – have happened anyway. And while the West may not be engaged militarily, it seems like everyone else is, from Russia to Iran to Gulf States to AQ.

It is on the record that in 2011 I was cautious about western military engagement in Syria. I saw many more risks than in Libya. By early 2012 I said that the balance of argument had changed. I said the burden of proof had shifted to those who opposed intervention, because I feared that the conflict was on course to become longer, more intractable, more deadly to Syrian civilians and more dangerous for the region and the wider world.

Today, the options have become much more difficult. I am very struck by the argument, recently made in cogent and compelling form by the International Crisis Group, and by the European Council on Foreign Relations, that 'intervention lite' – for example arming the rebels – is not going to tip the balance and is really beside the point. The stakes are higher, and the choices far tougher.

It is no longer my place to decide on military intervention. My priority is the safety of IRC and other humanitarian staff, and the people they serve. I advocate along with other NGOs, and the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos and High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, for humanitarian access inside Syria and extra help for the neighbours. This is desperately needed.

I can, however, observe that in the Syria conflict today there is an unequal fight between calls for political negotiations and the reality of war and chaos. Humanitarian NGOs are dealing with the consequences. Of course there needs to be a peace process based on negotiation. But Syria feels like an instance to support the maxim attributed to Frederick the Great: diplomacy without weapons is like music without instruments.

Syria's prospects are increasingly compared to Lebanon of the 1980s, which was the victim of other people's war games for 15 years. But Lebanon did not become the regional conflagration, nor the export terminus for global terrorism, that Syria is beginning to resemble. It looks more like Afghanistan than Lebanon to me.

The danger is not that Syria becomes the global norm, but that it is a harbinger of 21st century conflicts that bring disorder without all-out war. If the west is not going to intervene militarily, and the arguments are obviously finely balanced, then it will have to be more modest in its aims, and more decisive in its non military interventions, for example in the field of humanitarian aid, if it is to gain some protection from the disorder that is now threatened.

### **Decade of Disorder?**

Professor Stephen Pinker of Harvard University says this is the most peaceful time in human history. There are fewer wars. There is more democratic and accountable government than ever. There is more prosperity and less poverty. There are good reasons to believe that the major powers have more than enough incentive to settle differences amicably.

Yet despite these trends, there are more people fleeing conflict than ever before. UN Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres has calculated that here is one new refugee every 4.1 seconds – more than half from five countries (Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria and Sudan). Estimates from Lawrence Chandy of Brookings are that by 2030 two thirds of the world's poorest people, living on less than \$1.25

a day, will be living in fragile, ie conflict ridden, states. And conflict states in the developing world account for half of the world's children who die before their fifth birthday.

So there is a new geography to conflict and to poverty, focussed on fragile states stuck in a deadly equilibrium of sectarianism, poverty and conflict. This was highlighted in then Secretary of State for DFID Douglas Alexander's White Paper in 2009, and is being carried forward by the current UK government.

These fragile states and their people are not feeling the benefit of generalised forces for stability, prosperity and resilience – from economic growth to the rise of the open society to more accountable government. By their nature these forces are diffuse in their aim, long term in their impact, episodic in their influence and often double-edged in their potential.

On the other side of the balance sheet, the drivers of disorder and conflict are clear, powerful and focussed.

- There is increasing prominence in local ethnic and tribal ties over national ones. It is indicative, for example, to see Human Rights Watch put ethnic tension top of the list of priorities in Mali.

- Parts of the Islamic world are being fragmented into warring (and well funded) factions. I know that for many years in many countries Sunni and Shia muslims have lived alongside each other. There is high politics – and in some cases deliberate strategy – in the heightened sectarianism that we now see. As the Syrian journalist and civil rights lawyer Alia Malek has written: "While sectarianism has become the vehicle of the Syrian conflict, it was never its impulse".

- Resource scarcity, with rising food and energy prices plus a scramble for natural resources such as water or minerals, is fuelling tension. It is striking that UNEP has tracked 40 per cent of intra-state conflicts over the last sixty years to natural resources, and this link doubles the risk of a relapse to conflict in the first five years. Climate change is clearly a threat multiplier.

- So is migration, with 45 million refugees and IDPs a strain on cohesion and community.

This tells me various things relevant to my past life, and sets an agenda for my new one.

It tells me there is a massive job to bend economic growth in an inclusive direction. As Dr Jim Kim, President of the World Bank has said: "What we know is if you don't include the bottom 40 per cent, if you don't include women, if you don't include young people in that economic growth, you are building instability into your societies." Yet economic inequalities are profound and growing, not least in the mountainous number of young unemployed in the

developing as well as the developed world. This is a huge gamble with stability.

It tells me that peacekeeping needs countries like ours to be participants and not just payers. Peacekeeping is never a substitute for political strategy, but we have learnt a lot in twenty years, as operations have expanded significantly in their scale and scope since the end of the Cold War, with a growing regional component. It is easy to pick holes in the results – in the DRC for example – but East Timor, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Balkans are a rejoinder. The international system needs to put this experience to good use, and it needs our capacities.

It tells me we should not fear expanding the political ring. Politics needs to be inclusive too. Pakistan taught me this and Egypt if anything reinforces it. I remember when I first became Foreign Secretary there was entrenched resistance to the idea of Nawaz Sharif returning to Pakistan. But the effect of keeping him out was to drive up the extremist vote. So it made enormous sense to me for him to be in the system, subject to the disciplines of democratic politics, facing the need to be a responsible Opposition, and finally claiming power by democratic mandate.

When I look at the example of President Santos in Colombia talking to FARC, or President Aquino reaching an agreement with the insurgent MILF, or the Turkish government talks with the PKK, I don't just see political bravery and vision, but a belief that the discipline of politics strengthens the centre and disarms the extreme. Humanitarian NGOs have to talk to all kinds of movements, whatever their label, in the drive to meet need in an impartial and independent way. We cannot just wish they did not exist. The commitment of my former colleague Jonathan Powell to take the lessons of Northern Ireland and apply them more widely, through his new organisation Inter Mediate, is therefore in my view an exemplary public service.

One other point. The mismatch between generalised forces for stability and acute drivers of disorder also tells me to believe in the logic and potential of regional associations, starting in our own continent here in Europe, but not limited to this part of the world. It is easy to rubbish the EU and its weaker regional counterparts elsewhere in the world. Given the weakness of global governance, I don't see anything better on the horizon. But that is a subject for another day.

These issues are the province of my old life. So let me turn to my new one, and a major factor I have not discussed: humanitarian aid and its close relation international development.

### **The Challenges for the Humanitarian System**

Save the Children UK briefed me last week on their determination to make this the generation that

reduces to zero the number of children in the world who die before the age of five from preventable diseases. It is hard not to be inspired by that kind of ambition. It speaks to the idealism that fires the commitment and bravery of NGOs.

One of the attractions of the NGO sector, for me, is its capacity for innovation and risk taking. I am thinking of everything from helping survivors of sexual violence in the midst of conflict, to finding water in deep aquifers in the desert; from using mobile phone technology to track aid flows, to helping refugees in camps earn a living; from reducing tension between refugees and host communities, to market assessments designed to support local economies.

Emergency relief and development aid is to me a measure of our humanity. The best argument for such aid is that it saves and improves lives. The last Government in the UK institutionalised the mission of the aid budget to tackle global poverty. NGOs defend it. And it is significant when the current UK Prime Minister reaffirms it, as he does regularly and with passion.

Yet asserting the moral virtue of international aid does not remove its challenges, whether in emergency relief or long term development or the intersection of the two. A recent IPI overview, "Rethinking Humanitarianism" by Jeremie Labbe identified four big challenges for the humanitarian system. The growing caseload – and the mismatch between need and help. The changing nature of the crises that the humanitarian system has to address, exemplified by the issue of climate stress. The renewed assertiveness of "host" states, by which he means the crackdown on NGOs in some places. And the finite financial commitments that are pressuring donor budgets.

The context for humanitarian effort is changing fast, with new pressures displacing people and new players seeking to help them. I want to highlight four issues that will be high up my agenda when I start at IRC in September.

One is age old. It concerns the protection of civilians in conflict situations. We all know that the stronger versions of "Responsibility to Protect" are honoured in breach not observance. I am looking forward to the publication soon of Madeleine Albright's study of how the US should take forward the doctrine. Its importance is immediately evident when one sits in Jordan and is told by Syrian doctors that they have colleagues who have been killed by government forces for the sin of treating people in rebel areas. 20 Syrian Arab Red Crescent volunteers have been killed while doing their job of providing relief aid. There is a terrible irony in this since it was in Syria in 634 AD that the Caliph Abu Bakr implored the first Moslem Arab Army to learn the rules of war: "You must not mutilate, neither kill a child or aged man or woman" he said.

Since the days of the Caliph, and especially since the 1864 Geneva Convention following the Crimean War, the corpus of law and practice for the defence of civilians in conflict has been made comprehensive and clear, with special recent protection for women and girls, and for children. Yet there is political division, inertia and ennui when it comes to stopping the killing of civilians. The recent effort by the Foreign Minister of Australia to protect doctors in Syria ran into the sand. And it is not only in Syria that civilians have been killed without consequence.

The laws are there. The resolutions have been passed. The conventions ratified. There is a shared responsibility of governments and NGOs to establish how to make them relevant in practice.

The second issue is about new partnerships – with local people, with local and national governments, and with other NGOs and governments from outside the west. This is a growing theme in the humanitarian world, and its implications are far-reaching, from how aid is planned, to what it covers, and who it is delivered with. In essence it means a new business model based on local and national leadership with external support, rather than vice versa.

I have seen how in domestic policy a commitment to partnership with local people represents a massive shift with potential to deliver extraordinary results. The models of post-conflict transition advocated by the g7+, a group of 18 fragile states, with locally-determined priorities setting the agenda, point the way to the future.

Partnership in my experience means a mindshift from thinking about “building capacity”, as if it does not exist, to mobilising capacity, on the assumption that it does. It means abjuring “quick impact” in favour of locally-determined wins. It means thinking about the whole person, not just the service you are responsible for. It means recognising that ignoring the economy and private sector is a recipe for disaster. It means searching upstream to tackle problems at source – what the humanitarian community calls Disaster Risk Reduction, which the Ashdown Review highlighted for DFID in 2011, and which can be seen in practice in the contrasting experiences of Ethiopia and Somalia in dealing with the recent drought in the Horn of Africa.

In IRC that translates into achieving very high levels of local hiring; working with local leaders not around them; engaging marginalised groups, especially women; seeking private sector partners; and trying to understand the motivations of new players on the humanitarian scene, from the Gulf and from the BRICS.

The third issue has been raised recently by Hillary Clinton in forthright and stark terms. Helping women, she said, is not a “nice to have...some luxury that we

get to when we have time on our hands to spend”. It is instead an imperative.

The point is not just that although wars are traditionally fought by men, conflict settings are also the scene of unspeakable violence against women – a cause which I am happy to acknowledge is being forcefully advocated by my successor at the Foreign Office, William Hague. It is also an economic case and a political case, central to breaking the spiral of disorder and poverty that has been a focus of this lecture. IRC has been at the forefront of work against gender-based violence and for the empowerment of women, and I look forward to putting my ideas and effort into these causes.

The fourth issue is how rigorous evaluation can improve aid effectiveness. The humanitarian and development community is striving to evaluate its work as aggressively as possible. The IRC has been a leader in this effort by using randomized control trials accurately to assess a programme’s impact. We must learn what works and what does not, and we must be willing to shine the light on our failures as well as our successes in order to change practice and improve programming.

Evaluating humanitarian and development programmes is an especially difficult task given their settings and timelines. It takes rigour and of course funding. We have some hard thinking to do about what counts as success, and how to promote it. Done wrong, the demand from donors for outcome measures can lead to perverse results. Programmes can become warped as targets are chased rather than needs. What is measurable can become the guide rather than what is important to beneficiaries – which should be the real accountability. I have already heard how this is a real danger not just for NGOs, but for the people they serve. The best antidote is not to shun accountability, but to embrace it, and shape it in a sensible direction.

## Conclusion

The scale and consequence of the Syria crisis brings to mind the prescient and sad epitaph of Richard Holbrooke’s book *To End a War*. Many of you will know that the book celebrates the triumph of Richard’s unique brand of diplomacy. But it also says the following:

“There will be other Bosnias in our lives, different in every detail but similar in one overriding manner: they will originate in distant and ill-understood places, explode with little warning, and present the rest of the world with difficult choices – choices between risky involvement and potentially costly neglect...But if during the Cold War Washington sometimes seemed too ready to intervene, today America and its allies often seem too willing to ignore problems outside their heartland”.

One response is that a defensive realism is our best bet. Henry Kissinger once warned zealous liberal interventionists as follows: "Once the doctrine of universal intervention spreads and competing truths contest we risk entering a world in which, in GK Chesterton's phrase, 'virtue runs amok'".

This is the serious argument that problems in the Middle East, South Asia, or Africa are complex and longstanding, western interests there less than vital, its reputation sullied by well-publicised atrocities, and its resources decidedly limited, so it should be modest in our designs. Sure these places affect us, especially in an age of mobile jihadist movements, but the best we can do is insulate ourselves through effective counter-terrorism. And the last decade has shown the power of effective counter terrorist work – despite the recent horrors in Boston and Woolwich. As Richard Haas puts it in his new book, we need "less foreign policy".

However, that determination seems to me quite a gamble for a world in which the old order of national sovereignty is in some parts of the world breaking up under the weight of its own tensions. Defensive work to prevent the forces of disorder lapping up on our shores is vital. Restorative work to our economic situation and national priorities is important. But there is more to discuss – given our alliances, interests and values.

I leave this country for a job in the US conscious of the enduring strengths and fallibilities of both, but

also the common causes that join them together. In my political life, I have come to know that while the US and UK can get things wrong together, it is also the case that when the transatlantic partnership, and I use that phrase deliberately to include the rest of Europe, is not setting a global agenda, whether on security or climate change or development or financial stability or human rights, then too often there simply isn't a global agenda at all.

It is a sad fact that it is easier to find points of dispute about or veto on global cooperation today than sponsors of shared initiatives, more incentives for countries to say no to proposals than actually to make them. Contrary to much of what we hear in the UK about the European Union, the danger today is not an international system of institutions and rules that is too strong and overbearing, but rather one that is far too weak and divided for the burdens of an interdependent and unbalanced world.

The debate about intervention has taken many turns in the last twenty years. My own view is that the big question is not whether to intervene but how; not less foreign policy but better. Iraq and Afghanistan are their own warning. But they cannot be the last word or trump card in discussion. An interdependent world does not offer the option of a quiet life. So the choice is engagement or disengagement – and I would prefer a course of activism to prevent problems, rather than passivity before reacting to them. That is the real challenge after the decade of war.