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The Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Cabinet Office  
70 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AS

10 September 2013

Dear Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition,

In the aftermath of the UK parliamentary vote on military action in Syria, we have set aside our views on military intervention in Syria to urge you to reiterate a strong cross-party support for the UN Resolution passed in 2005 on the Responsibility to Protect civilians. Whatever one's views on the vote, this must not be the point in British history at which we reach a fork in the road and choose to abandon such an important notion of collective global responsibility.

The UK has been a long-time champion of this emerging norm of international law that states that when a government is unable or unwilling to protect its own civilian population from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity the international community has a responsibility and obligation to respond. Most often, the response should be one of diplomacy and negotiation. In certain cases, we must be able and willing to intervene militarily. For some of us, Syria was one such case. For others, a persuasive and credible case has not been made.

Whatever our views on Syria, we agree that the UK has not and should not renounce its aspiration and ability to engage internationally on the most urgent matters of our time. To do so would be to unlearn the lessons of the world's worst atrocities, such as the genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia.

It is undeniable that the Iraq war has left the British public fearful of military entanglement. It is understandable that the global recession has left us protective of a fragile economy and unwilling to spend millions on military adventures. It is true that military intervention is only rarely the right answer. But we must be careful not to position Britain on the side of permanent inaction. We hope you will all take the opportunity in the coming weeks to make it clear that the recent vote on Syria, whatever else it meant, did not and will not mean the UK stepping away from its responsibility to protect civilians.

Yours sincerely,

The Rt Hon Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon

The Rt Hon David Blunkett MP

The Rt Hon Charles Clarke

The Lord Hannay of Chiswick

The Rt Hon Lord Howard of Lympne QC

The Rt Hon Lord Hutton of Furness

Mr Bernard Jenkin MP

The Rt Hon Lord Malloch Brown of St Leonard's Forest

The Rt Hon Lord Mandelson of Foy

The Rt Hon Alan Milburn

The Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP

The Baroness Neuberger of Primrose Hill

Mr Richard Ottoway MP

The Rt Hon Lord Owen of the City of Plymouth

The Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP

The Rt Hon Lord Robertson of Port Ellen

The Rt Hon Nicholas Soames MP

The Rt Hon Jacqui Smith

Lord Bishop of Wakefield, the Rt Revd Stephen Platten