ANDREW MARR SHOW, STEWART HOSIE, DEPUTY LEADER SNP, 29th Nov

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AM: Have you been having conversations with the government about this vote?

SH: Well there have been all sorts of conversations, but the key thing we've had is no answers to the key issues we raised with the Prime Minister.

AM: Let's go through, what are your big objections to going ahead with air strikes?

SH: We'd said, firstly there needed to be a UN resolution, a Chapter 7 Resolution, which specifically allowed for military intervention. Secondly, we needed to understand the efficacy of the bombing. You made the point yourself a few moments ago that a few more bombs might not make any difference.

AM: It might be helpful, sorry, forgive me, if we go through these one by one. So the UN Resolution, it may not be specific but it's pretty clear and it's backed by a lot of countries around the world. Does it really need more than that?

SH: It is backed by a number of countries but the specific resolution guarantees international legality and shows the determination of the international community to act as one, and in the absence of that then any rough or broad or agreement one might have could simply splinter and fall apart.

AM: All right. I would have thought that if the United States and Russia and France are all involved, if most of the Nato countries are going, the chances of this being shot down legally must be pretty slim.
SH: Well I think the argument is a slightly different one. If the US and Russia and France and the others are together and united then there’s no reason whatsoever why the Prime Minister, or others, shouldn’t seek a proper UN Resolution.

AM: Okay, your second point is what can we actually do that nobody can else can do, is that right?

SH: Indeed. The efficacy of the bombing, you know, the one thing the Syria doesn’t lack is people dropping bombs on her. Jordan, the UAE, Russia, Turkey, France, any number of sides in this multifaceted civil war and we are yet to be convinced that the UN, or the UK rather, flying a few more sorties over Raqqa is going to make any significant difference.

AM: Well, we’re going to hear I’m sure from the Defence Secretary later on that with these Brimstone missiles they are able to take out very, very key people in the leadership of Isil or Isis or whatever we call it, Daesh, and that that is something special we can do.

SH: But we’ve heard this in conflict after conflict after conflict. Osama bin Laden turned up in a military compound in Pakistan; no amount of smart weaponry was able to take him out and I’m sceptical about all of these laser-targeted weapons which every country claims to have, yet the leadership of Isis, as we heard earlier in the newspaper review scurry into tunnels leaving the poor civilians to take it on the chin or the head.

AM: What about what happens at the end of all of this. How much is that your concern?

SH: That’s absolutely vital. I mean the third point we had made is where is the plan for reconstruction and stabilisation? Because without that we end up in an Iraq situation where we create an even bigger vacuum to be filled potentially by even more nasty
people than IS. And we look back in Libya, a conflict which we backed, where the UK spent 13 times more on bombing than reconstruction and it’s now anarchy.

AM: These are powerful arguments which I will be putting to Mr Fallon later on of course in the show. However, I suppose the big counter argument is, Isil or Daesh have a territory about the same size as Britain now which they relatively securely control and while they’re there they can plot and plan, safely, attacks on this country and send people to attack this country and so long as that is the case we are not safe. And if the SNP’s position is in effect do nothing, that’s not going to keep the people of Glasgow or Edinburgh or Dundee very secure.

SH: It isn’t, to do nothing. We want to see Daesh degraded and destroyed as much as anyone, so the first thing -
AM: How?
SH: - the first thing we need to do is have a truce between the non ISIS or non Daesh factions in Syria. They’re the ones who will take the fight to them on the ground. We need more support for the Peshmerga so that they can take the fight to them on the ground. We should be following the money, they’re selling prodigious amounts of oil, where’s it going to? Who’s transporting it? They’re buying in huge amounts of ammunition, who’s supplying it? Let’s follow the money and degrade and destroy in every conceivable way.

AM: To be fair to them, I mean, the Americans and the Russians now I think are bombing these oil convoys and, on the other point of the broader coalition, this involves people who have been fighting to the death against Assad’s regime now for years and taking huge losses, suddenly turned around and joining hands with the regime and that seems to a lot of people completely impossible.
SH: Well it does, except there are large numbers of truces within Syria between what were FSA fighters and the Assad government troops. They’ve already agreed truces in many areas in order to fight Daesh and that’s obviously the right thing to do, because the other part of this argument, in terms of what’s going to happen next. David Cameron, the Prime Minister, talks of 70 thousand FSA fighters, a) they probably don’t exist, b) they’ve very split and c) they’re probably in the wrong place. So we’re not convinced by that, but we will need troops on the ground and in the absence of a non Isis truce in Syria goodness know where they’re going to come from.

AM: Now just in terms of this vote which is probably happening, we’re not sure at the moment, probably happening on Wednesday, last week your leader Nicola Sturgeon said that she was in listening mode still, she was prepared to listen to the government’s arguments, listening to you now it sounds like the SNP has made up its mind which way to vote.

SH: Well, we have listened, we’re still listening, we’ve asked questions. Even last week on the day of the Autumn Statement I asked the Chancellor what has been set aside for reconstruction and stabilisation in Syria. Their answer there came none. Unless they have the plan, which not just the SNP but many people want to see to avoid the anarchy of Libya, then of course we couldn’t possibly support conflict in the current climate.

AM: Briefly, David Cameron did say he’d got a billion pounds set aside, it may not be enough but he did set aside a billion pounds. What could he now say to you that might change your mind?

SH: Well, he needs to answer all the questions. He needs to say yes, we will seek a specific UN mandate, yes we need to have a proper fund – or a proper plan more accurately - for stabilisation and reconstruction, and he needs to demonstrate the efficacy of a
few more bombs on Raqqa, because right now we’re not convinced.

AM: Some way to go. Stewart Hosie, thank you.

ENDS