

PO Box 2278  
Ilford  
Essex  
IG1 9XT

The Rt. Hon. David Miliband MP,  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA.

**T:** 020 7330 8796  
**E:** [info@iengage.org.uk](mailto:info@iengage.org.uk)  
**W:** [www.iengage.org.uk](http://www.iengage.org.uk)

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Dear Mr Miliband,

It is with considerable interest that I followed your interjections in the debate on the Gaza flotilla in the House of Commons on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and subsequently, your article for the Labour Friends of Palestine and the Middle East (LFPME), 'Working for Peace in the Middle East'.

You will be aware of our earlier letters to you in your former position as Foreign Secretary during the Israeli assault on Gaza (letters dated 14<sup>th</sup> January, 19<sup>th</sup> March and 26<sup>th</sup> May 2009). We raised with you then the position of Her Majesty's Government in desisting from supporting economic sanctions against Israel during her military incursion into Gaza in December 2008 – January 2009.

We also raised with you questions concerning investigations into the allegations of war crimes committed during that war and the support to be expected from HMG for a robust inquiry (subsequently satisfied in the publication of the UN Goldstone Report though HMG chose to abstain from the vote taken to adopt the report at the UN Human Rights Council in November 2009. As well as questions over compliance of arms export licenses in arms sales to Israel during that war (compliance which was subsequently found wanting by the Committees on Arms Export Controls in the report 'Scrutiny of Arms Export Controls, 2010'); questions over the suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, as a means of influencing Israeli policy on inclining towards peace, and questions over HMG's policy on the opening of direct channels of communication with Hamas, following a u-turn in its policy on engaging with the political wing of Hizbullah.

We are heartened by your criticism in the debate in the House of the Israeli blockade of Gaza as a '*failed policy*' which, running contrary to its stated aims, '*has done nothing to defeat terrorism*', and your emphasis on the role of the EU and other Quartet members, (the UN, US and Russia), in applying '*pressure, not just engagement*' to their demands on Israel implementing the terms of UN Security Council resolution 1860.

You are absolutely correct to state that what is happening in Gaza is '*a political crisis, not just a humanitarian one*' and that it behoves the British government, her European partners, the international community, and the US government, to urgently put Gaza at the heart of policy for peace in the Middle East. Such is imperative to the establishment of two states, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in security, freedom and dignity.

I noted the three priorities you have set out in your article for the Labour Friends of Palestine, and I would offer the following thoughts on these:

1. You call for an *'active and substantive top down political process alongside a vibrant process of state building'*.

This first priority reminds me of your speech at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies last year, 'Our shared future: building coalitions and winning consent', in which you outlined the importance of building coalitions with states and governments in pursuit of common objectives while remaining mindful of the need for the consent of citizens if policies are to enjoy democratic legitimacy.

I would contend, however, that the current policy of HMG and the EU in favouring the West Bank in all Palestinian affairs, the so-called 'West Bank first policy', detracts from the aims you set out above and principally the possibility of intra-Palestinian unity. The establishment of a unity coalition covering Gaza and the West Bank, in the interests of better democratic governance for the Palestinian people, is made all the more difficult by the EU's insistence on dealing preferentially with only one part of those two territories.

There is an urgent need for a rethink of our current policy on freezing Hamas out of any discussions on peace between Palestinians and Israelis. I hope you will agree that this forms an essential part of the 'active and substantive top down political process' that we must now pursue. It is a policy which is supported by Louise Arbour, the president of the International Crisis Group and the former UK Ambassador to the UN, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, and a policy with which we fully concur.

2. You say that *'The EU needs to make its voice heard in the Quartet. And the UK needs to make its presence felt bilaterally and internationally, both in political and practical terms.'*

You will recall that the EU did not make its voice felt in June 2008 when it resolved to upgrade the EU-Israel Association Agreement expanding Israel's involvement in Community programmes, or again in June 2009, when the EU-Israel Association Council met again to consider further the scope of the agreement.

This despite Israel's contravention of the terms of the agreement that requires contracting parties to respect *"human rights and democratic principles, [in] their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this agreement."*

The EU's policy of tacitly supporting the Israeli blockade of Gaza is a further instance of the Union failing to make its voice heard in the Quartet, by urging an immediate end to the inhumane conditions that Gazans have lived under for more than 3 years now. Even though members of the European Parliament, and more recently Baroness Catherine Ashton, have travelled to the region and witnessed for themselves the appalling situation that the people of Gaza are forced to suffer.

3. You state that the *'regional dimension'* is an essential component in any peace settlement in the Middle East with *'a 23 state solution'* being the end result of the final negotiations for peace.

The regional dimension is indeed an absolute necessity both for the future security of Palestinians as well as Israelis. It is within the wider region of the Middle East that the

two states, Palestine and Israel, will conduct their economic and political affairs and it is in full appreciation of the regional dimension that peace must be secured.

I would add here that the perception of the UK and Quartet members in the region as impartial brokers is widely discredited. This has been seen in their denying the legitimacy of the regional government of Gaza following Hamas's elections victories of 2005 and 2006; in the manner of their handling of the findings of the UN Goldstone Report into alleged war crimes committed during Israeli incursions into Gaza; in their supporting the blockade of Gaza; and finally, in the recent attacks on the Mavi Marmara and their accepting the terms of the internal inquiry as set out by the Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu, despite UN support for an 'international inquiry'. The composition of the inquiry panel, including observers that are known for their pro-Israeli bias, will only further feed these perceptions of partiality and fuel distrust.

Mr Miliband, you will be aware of the 2007 report of the foreign affairs select committee, 'Global Security: The Middle East', which stated:

*"We are concerned that the damage done to the Government's reputation in the Arab and Islamic world may affect its ability to influence the political situation in the Middle East."*

It is a concern that persists and one which needs urgent attention if the UK is to play a role bilaterally and internationally to positive effect in the region. We look forward to working with you on this and welcome a meeting at your earliest convenience to discuss further the points raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Mohammed Asif  
CEO