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The Rt. Hon. William Hague MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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Thursday 27th January 2011

Dear Foreign Secretary,

It is with real concern that we came to learn yesterday of the “Palestinian Security Plan” allegedly drawn up by MI6 and published in The Guardian from among a cache of papers leaked to the newspaper (and Al Jazeera) on the Middle East peace process.

The “Palestine Papers” and the “security plan” document, dating back to 2003, refers to a “two-stage” security plan in which MI6 appears to endorse various courses of action as a means of “degrading the capabilities of the rejectionists.” “Rejectionists” meaning: Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Al Aqsa Brigade (AAB).

Courses of action suggested to “degrade the capabilities of the “Rejectionists” include:

- disrupt[ing] the communications and command and control capabilities of the leaderships of Hamas, PIS and AAB
- the detention of key middle-ranking officers
- the confiscation of their arsenals and financial resources held in the Occupied Territories
- explore the temporary internment of leading Hamas and PIJ figures, making sure they are well-treated, with EU funding

The intended purpose of the actions above are stated in the leaked document to be *“improving the political, economic and security environment for the Palestinians,”* and *“enhance[ing] the ability of the PA [Palestinian Authority] to take them [Hamas, PIJ and AAB] on.”*

The claims, if true, are a sorry reflection of the UK’s intervention in Middle East affairs and beg a number of questions on the British Government’s respect for and heed of recommendations contained in the reports of the Foreign Affairs select committee on “Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories” (OPT), in addition to other good counsel on directly engaging Hamas in the peace negotiations.

1. We would begin by asking whether Her Majesty’s Government (HMG) recognises the right of Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to resist the occupation and protect themselves and their families against the excesses of Israeli oppression in the OPT, as enshrined under UN Resolution No 2621 (XXV), “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples”?

2. Does HMG believe that the “*detention of key middle-ranking officers*” and “*temporary internment of leading Hamas and PIJ figures, making sure they are well-treated, with EU funding,*” are defensible actions positively contributing to a durable and stable settlement of the conflict?
3. Is it true that HMG entertained the “*confiscation of [Hamas and PIJ] arsenals and financial resources held in the Occupied Territories,*” while the Committees on Arms Export Controls in their report, *Scrutiny of Arms Export Controls (2010)* found the UK guilty of breaching export license controls because UK arms were “*almost certainly*” used by Israel in Operation Cast Lead? We would further add that Israel’s war crimes during that conflict have been well documented by the UN in the Goldstone Report and by Amnesty International. We find it hugely disappointing that HMG has been so eager to degrade the “*financial resources*” of a popular Palestinian resistance movement while being so reluctant to apply sanctions, or to boycott, the occupying power, Israel, which is in defiance of numerous UN resolutions calling upon it to withdraw from the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Does HMG recognise the damage these inconsistencies in policy do to our role in the Middle East peace process and our reputation as a, purportedly, impartial broker?

4. The leaked document appears to reinforce HMG’s (and the EU’s) “*West Bank first*” approach, to the Middle East conflict and we would pose again our question on whether the Government is willing to heed the recommendation of the foreign affairs select committee reports on engaging with Hamas as the legitimate ruling authority in Gaza?

The “*West Bank first*” approach, which has sought to bolster the authority of the PA in the West Bank above that of the Hamas-led authority in Gaza, has been widely criticised for its contributing to intra-Palestinian division and damaging any prospects for a reconciliation. It has also contributed to perceptions of double standards and disregard among Quartet members for the abuses of authority by the PA.

The exclusion of Hamas from direct negotiations and the negative consequences of proceeding with a peace plan that neglects its significance and buy-in to any long term and sustainable outcome has been well argued by, among others, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, former British Ambassador to the UN and Lord Chris Patten, former European Commissioner for External Relations. Will the HMG review its policy in light of the failures of the approach and the criticisms it has attracted over its futility and its contributing to moral failure in addressing the brutality and excesses of the West Bank authorities?

5. The leaked document also argues for the EU to “*use [its] financial leverage to help maintain momentum on [PA] reform*” in non-security spheres.

The suggestion strikes us as rather perverse given the lackadaisical attitude of the UK and EU on exercising their “*financial leverage*” on Israel to induce its compliance with UN resolutions on the illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The Prime Minister, David Cameron, in his address at the Conservative Friends of Israel business lunch in December 2010, said, “*...when we see boycotts and calls for boycotts*”

on Israel, we shouldn't just dismiss them, we should go in completely the opposite direction: showing the world that we are proud to do business with Israel."

We would argue that the leaked document disgrace the security agencies and the purported role HMG claims to play in negotiating for peace in the Middle East.

The security agencies have suffered tremendous damage to their credibility in the wake of several court cases and emerging allegations of their complicity in the torture of British Muslims abroad.

The contents of the leaked documents appearing in The Guardian this week will do little to convince British Muslims and others that we are sincere and committed to our goals of establishing two states; a viable Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel. Nor will it assuage those critics of our policy on meddling with internal political dynamics and frustrating the rights of the Palestinians to choose their own leadership.

The foreign affairs select committee in its Fifth report on Global Security: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (session 2008-09) argued in favour of a change in HMG policy on engaging with Hamas stating:

"[T]wo years after we advocated a shift to engagement with moderate elements within Hamas, we conclude that there continue to be few signs that the current policy of non-engagement is achieving the Quartet's stated objectives. We further conclude that the credible peace process for which the Quartet hopes, as part of its strategy for undercutting Hamas, is likely to be difficult to achieve without greater co-operation from Hamas itself. We are concerned that the Quartet is continuing to fail to provide Hamas with greater incentives to change its position. We therefore reiterate our recommendation from 2007, that "the Government should urgently consider ways of engaging politically with moderate elements within Hamas as a way of encouraging it to meet the three Quartet principles." We further recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government should set out the specific indicators, if any, that would trigger a shift of British Government policy towards engagement with Hamas."

The committee in assessing the FCO's performance and delivery of a 2004 PSA target on "Islamic countries", argued in its Eighth report on Global Security: The Middle East (session 2006 – 07) that "...there is no mention of the impact of ... the refusal to engage with Hamas or Hezbollah in delivering this PSA target," and that HMG should "...give sufficient weight to the impact of British policy in Iraq, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, "in meeting Departmental objectives.

The committee further argued, *"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."*

We hope the Government will reflect on the recommendations of the select committee reports and change its policy to directly engage with Hamas in order to realise tenable advancements on peace in the Middle East. We also hope that HMG will use this opportunity to put some distance between itself and the failed policies of the past, and set out a more sensible future approach. One which recognises the legitimate rights of the Palestinians to freely choose their leadership, and to work with their elected

representatives to secure the two-state solution that we have long and strongly advocated.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Mohammed Asif
CEO

CC. The Rt. Hon. Theresa May MP, Home Secretary, The Rt. Hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind QC MP, Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee and Rt. Hon. Richard Burden MP, chairman of the Britain-Palestine All-Party Parliamentary Group.