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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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Tuesday 28th February 2012

Dear Foreign Secretary,

We are writing in regards to your recent comments on Iran in the parliamentary debate of 20th February in which you stated the country was *"keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons"* and this was catastrophically leading to a *"nuclear arms race in the region."*

You spoke of the alleged nuclear weapons programme of the Iranian regime having *"devastating consequences for the middle east"* and potentially shattering the non-proliferation treaty.

We have written to you previously on the subject of Iran, specifically in response to your comment piece in The Times newspaper, *'The clock is ticking. Iran must come to the table'*, (The Times, 11th June 2010).

The question we raised in our letter dated 11th June 2010, on the robust defence of sanctions against Iran by the British Government, remain relevant and pertinent in light of your statement to the House in last week's debate.

Foreign Secretary, you spoke of the sanctions as serving *"to show the Iranian Government that there is a considerable price attached to their current policies and to urge them to change course."*

You added that the sanctions were necessary to enforce Iran's compliance with the demands of the IAEA and UN, which you argued it would *"otherwise flout with impunity."*

You also referred to various belligerent acts by the regime in Iran as supporting the supposition that its intentions in allegedly acquiring nuclear weapons are malign and therefore of grave concern to the UK. Examples you gave include the regime's record on human rights, its support for "armed proxy groups" such as Hizbullah and Hamas, and the allegations of its involvement in the attacks on Israeli diplomats in south east Asia.

Foreign Secretary, consistent with our previous letter on this same subject, we would again inquire as to why the British Government should so forcefully and passionately defend the use of sanctions against Iran, and fail, with an equivalent show of force and passion, to contemplate sanctions against Israel, a known nuclear weapons state in the middle east?

The suggestion that Iran acquiring nuclear weapons would set off an arms race in the region neglects an important extant factor, that Israel's possession of nuclear weapons would indicate a race is

already underway. Is it the belief of the British Government that Israel's possession of nuclear weapons does not already pose a question of serious concern over the "*devastating consequences for the middle east*" that flow from that fact?

Moreover, Israel's persistent refusal to sign the non-proliferation treaty, despite the entreaties of the UN and IAEA, would suggest that far from Iran's possible nuclear weapons development shattering the non-proliferation treaty, the treaty is pretty well defunct already. Any attempt to cite compliance with its requirements in relation to Iran would fall flat for no other reason than the lack of pressure applied to force Israel's compliance with the same. Does the British Government not regard Israel's obdurate refusal to sign the non-proliferation treaty as evidence of its being shattered?

The examples cited in the parliamentary debate of last week, on Iran's belligerent actions in the region and elsewhere, serve to bolster the proposition that we are dealing with an errant regime, unresponsive to international law or conventions on human rights, and supportive of non-state actors engaged in terrorist activities. Such examples are used to defend the sanctions as a necessary measure to deter further threatening behaviour and to paint a menacing picture.

Foreign Secretary, as put forward by Ben Wallace MP, co-chair of the all party group on Iran, what we seek, and must seek, in our dealings with Iran is consistency.

When Israel is permitted to flout international law with impunity by continuing illegal settlement building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the question asked by those observing the UK Government's campaign against Iran is "where is the consistency?"

When Iran stands accused of threatening the future of the non-proliferation treaty and regional stability in the Middle East by allegedly pursuing a covert nuclear weapons programme, the question asked by those cognisant of Israel's possession of nuclear weapons and refusal to sign the non-proliferation treaty is "where is the consistency?"

When Iran is accused of supporting "armed proxy groups" and acts of terrorism committed by non-state actors, the question asked by those critical of Israel's engagement in state-sponsored terrorism in Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in December 2009-January 2010, is "where is the consistency?"

When Iran's record on human rights is used to portray the regime as brutal, those campaigning for the rights of the occupied Palestinian people relentlessly ask "where is the consistency?"

When Iran stands accused of showing no regard for international law and engaging in belligerent acts threatening the security of her own people and others in the region, those campaigning for Israel's compliance with international law in the cases of the storming of the Mavi Marmara in May 2010 and the extra-judicial killing of the Palestinian, Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, in Dubai in January 2010; the latter incident involving the forging of British passports by Israeli intelligence, inevitably ask the question "where is the consistency?"

On the point of international law, it is noteworthy that there has been talk of Israel launching "unilateral action" against Iran and logic would demand that we ask, again, where is the consistency when members of the international community can threaten to engage militarily against another member of the international community with no regard for international law and *casus belli*?

Foreign Secretary, the matter of Iran's nuclear intentions remains circumspect with circumstantial evidence provided to bolster a hawkish position but little hard evidence put forth to prove it conclusive. The "sabre-rattling" obscures the truths that should concern us in this matter and in this we must abide by the findings of the IAEA reports if we are to pursue a course that is open, transparent, and defensible to the British people; who have been misled by their government on Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction in the recent past.

We remain fully committed to a nuclear free middle east and to the preservation of the conditions of the non-proliferation treaty. What remains enduring in our deliberations on the issue of Iran, and our engagement in the region more generally, is the question of our consistency of approach. There is among British Muslims an abiding perception of an unstinting inconsistency and of double standards in our relations with states in the Middle East region. Such perceptions are only likely to be reinforced by the proceedings of last week's parliamentary debate.

We would welcome your response to the arguments laid out above.

Yours sincerely,

Shenaz Bunglawala