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Rt. Hon Emily Thornberry MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

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Dear Emily,

I was very disappointed to read your letter to Jeremy Hunt regarding the situation in Syria. I'm afraid it is nothing short of a complete misreading of the facts.

The leadership of Iran has consistently made clear its desire to destroy Israel. The comments you refer to by Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh are simply the latest in a series of bellicose threats by Tehran dating back to the Islamic revolution in 1979. As the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stated last June: "Our stance against Israel is the same stance we have always taken. #Israel is a malignant cancerous tumour in the West Asian region that has to be removed and eradicated: it is possible and it will happen. [my emphasis]"

Khamenei has also previously branded Israel as "barbaric," "infanticidal," and the "sinister, unclean rabid dog of the region".

The supposedly moderate president, Hassan Rouhani, has mimicked such language, suggesting last November that "one of the ominous results of World War II was the formation of a cancerous tumour [Israel] in the region". I am sure I do not need to remind you of the constant threats issued by Rouhani's predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The current tensions between Israel and Iran in Syria stem from these threats and the desire of Tehran to turn them into a reality.

Thus, with the connivance of Russia – on whom, I note, you once again fail to place any responsibility for the death and destruction it has wrought in Syria – Iran has worked in recent years to use Syria as a base from which to attack Israel. It is frankly incredible that your letter fails to make any mention of Hezbollah. As you know, Hezbollah – the proxy army of Iran, which is funded and directed by Tehran – has a long history of carrying out terrorist attacks against Israeli, Jewish and western targets throughout the world.

It, too, has made clear its goal: the destruction of the world's only Jewish state. In its founding manifesto in 1985 Hezbollah says of Israel: "Our struggle will end only when this entity is obliterated. We recognise no treaty with it, no cease-fire, and no peace agreements, whether separate or consolidated."

This goal is motivated by deep-seated antisemitism. As its secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, has suggested: "If [Jews] all gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them worldwide."

With Iran's active encouragement, vast sums of money and overt assistance, Hezbollah is working to realise this mission. It has recruited an army of 45,000 men and amassed an estimated 120,000 140,000 rockets and missiles – an arsenal larger than that of many states – thousands of which are capable of hitting civilian targets across Israel. Only last month, Hezbollah deputy secretary general Naim Qassem boasted that all of Israel was within range of its mission, stating: "The entire Israeli homefront is exposed, even Tel Aviv." Moreover, last month saw the discovery of Hezbollah tunnels crossing from Lebanon into the Galilee region – a clear contravention of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 – which were designed to allow it to launch a surprise attack and infiltrate large number of troops into Israel. I would be grateful if you could point me to your condemnation of this discovery.

Iran has attempted to use its position in Syria to transfer what Israel believes to be "game-changing" weapons to Hezbollah; to assist Hezbollah in the manufacture of precision-missiles; and to establish a permanent military presence for itself in the country. Indeed, despite agreements signed by Russia and the US in late 2017, Iran has continued to work to increase its presence in southern Syria. This was evident in the construction last year of a new military base south of Damascus, a mere 31 miles from the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

It is this context and background which is totally absent from your letter.

I agree that all sides should do whatever they can to respect and protect the lives of Syrian civilians. But let us be clear: the huge and tragic loss of life in Syria over the past eight years is the responsibility of the Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian allies, which have committed multiple war crimes. It is a shameful that the Labour frontbench has repeatedly and consistently failed to make clear that fact.

In a dispute between the Middle East's only democracy and a brutal theocracy which sponsors and promotes terrorism and revels in its antisemitism, the Labour party's sympathies and solidarity should be clearly stated. It is tragic and unfortunate that this is not the case.

I would very much appreciate the opportunity for myself and other LFI officers to meet with you to discuss this.

Yours sincerely,



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