



Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

26 March 2020

Dear Dominic,

British policy on Syria

We write to express our grave concerns about British policy on Syria as reflected in the Joint Statement, published on 15 March, by the UK, US, France and Germany.

The statement is, as might be expected, highly critical of the Assad regime but it provides a simplified analysis of a complicated country in a complex region. There are at least four serious omissions:

- It overlooks the fact that around three quarters of habitable Syria and two thirds of the overall territory is now controlled by the Syrian government.
- There is no reference to the Syrian army's defeat of Islamist extremist forces in Palmyra, Deir Ez Zor, Yarmouk Camp, Suweida and elsewhere. Rather, the statement claims that the Global Coalition and the Syrian Democratic Forces liberated "all territory once held by Daesh"; this is simply false.
- Nor is there any reference to the complex network of armed opposition groups, many of which adopt the same extremist policies as Daesh or Jabhat al-Nusra, including abductions into sexual slavery, torture, burning civilians alive and beheadings, and which continue to attack areas under the Syrian government's control.
- The statement also overlooks the disastrous impact of sanctions, backed by the UK, which greatly harm civilians, for whom it is very difficult to obtain adequate food supplies, medicines and medical equipment, let alone employment. According to *The Lancet*, sanctions "are among the biggest

causes of suffering for the people of Syria and a major factor perpetuating the conflict.”

It is, of course, impossible to condone violations of human rights by the Assad regime but the reality is that, given the support of Russia and Iran, it is now here to stay. The UK’s commitment to a transition of power, as a prerequisite of any settlement, has proved unachievable and will remain so.

It is now abundantly clear that our policy in Syria has not only failed but has contributed to one of the worst humanitarian disasters of our time. It is surely time for a policy review, taking full account of our interests involved. Chief among them must be the denial of Syrian territory to Daesh and its allies, as well as the lifting of sanctions. Continuation of current policies will only help the Islamist extremists, prolong the suffering of the Syrian people and weaken the stability of the Middle East as a whole.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Green of Deddington (British Ambassador to Syria 1991-94)

Peter Ford (British Ambassador to Syria 2003-06)

Baroness Cox

Lord West of Spithead

Lord Carey of Clifton

Lord Hylton

Lord Alderdice

Lord Stoddart of Swindon

Revd Dr Andrew Ashdown

Dr Audrey Wells

Dr John Eibner

Dr Michael Langrish

Reply to: The Baroness Cox, House of Lords, SW1A 0PW