



Foreign Affairs Committee

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Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth office
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12 April 2016

Dear Philip.

Libya

I am writing on behalf of the Committee in response to your letter dated Sunday 27 March on the possible deployment of British troops to Libya, which replied to my letter of 15 March requesting an urgent update on the possible deployment of UK assets in support of the new Government of National Accord in Libya.

Disappointingly, I first read your letter the day before it was sent, when it was quoted verbatim in The Telegraph. The article, “Senior Tories attack ‘disastrous plan’ to station 1,000 UK troops in Libya”, included the statement that The Telegraph had “seen a letter sent by the Foreign Secretary to Mr Blunt.” I know that you had approved a text, which was then called in by No.10 no doubt for presentational “improvements”. I anticipate that your original draft was rather more straightforward than the final version.

In your letter, you rejected my observation that “the UK, with allies, is preparing to deploy ground troops to Libya”. You went on to state that the UK is engaging “in discussions about a Libyan International Assistance Mission (LIAM).” I hope you will concede that it is an immensely narrow point to differentiate between engaging “in discussions about a Libyan International Assistance Mission” and “preparing to deploy ground troops to Libya”, bearing in mind the context that international officials—including our excellent ambassador to Libya—face the immediate challenge of enabling the Government of National Accord to move to Tripoli.

Your statement that “at no point did British diplomats” brief the Committee on the deployment of British troops to Libya is very strictly correct. However, that point is so narrow as to be wholly and deliberately misleading to the uninformed reader. As you are no doubt aware given your careful choice of words, the briefing came from another official British source working at the direction of the Defence Attaché and witnessed by British diplomats. Furthermore, the potential deployment of British troops as part of LIAM was the subject of general discussion among politicians and civilian and military policymakers of various nationalities based in Tunis.

Then there is your statement that “it is incorrect to suggest that the Defence Secretary will imminently agree any UK contribution” to LIAM. I hope that the concern expressed by the

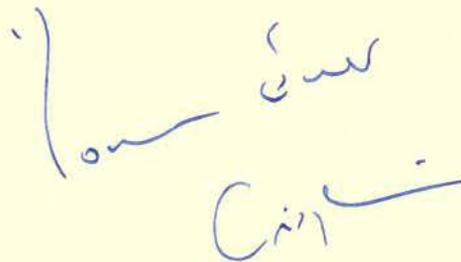
Foreign Affairs Committee about the proposed deployment led to this conclusion. When we wrote seeking a statement clarifying the position to Parliament, all that was known was that the Government of National Accord had just been recognised by the UN Security Council and that Defence Ministers from various nations were due to discuss which forces might contribute to LIAM.

In addition, I question your distinction between “routine deployments” and “conflict deployments”. Libya is a failed state experiencing a multi-front civil war, so any deployment of British troops would, by definition, be a “conflict deployment”.

Finally, I am concerned by your statement that the UK is “providing military advisers” to the “Libyan authorities in Libya”. The “Libyan authorities in Libya” is a curious phrase, given the disparate military and political structures in Libya and the Government of National Accord’s limited ability to exercise power. Precisely which of the various political and military organisations in Libya is the UK advising? And how many “advisers” have been committed to this role?

In conclusion, the Foreign Affairs Committee remains deeply concerned by potential British military involvement in Libya, not to mention the consequences of our policy since 2011. I therefore repeat my request that you make a statement to Parliament clarifying (a) the UK’s current military deployment in Libya; (b) the UK’s plans to deploy troops to Libya, including LIAM; and (c) invite your latest assessment of the effectiveness of the Government of National Accord.

I regret having to write in these terms. The welcome candour of briefings by all whom we met in Cairo and Tunis contrasts sharply with your less-than-candid reply to my request for further detail on a rapidly developing situation that may require further active British engagement. We have nothing but admiration for the excellent work being done by the international diplomats—and in particular by those from the UK—who recently appear to be making good progress in assisting the people of Libya to emerge from the nightmare of the past five years. The international community undoubtedly faces a tough challenge in supporting those diplomatic efforts in the complex environment of Libya. However, that challenge can only be made more difficult by not dealing straightforwardly with Parliament.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Crispin Blunt', written over a faint, illegible background.

Crispin Blunt MP
Chairman