



Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP  
Secretary of State for Defence  
Ministry of Defence  
Floor 5, Zone D  
Main Building  
Whitehall  
London SW1A 2HB

30 August 2019

Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State, and I am sorry that this, my first letter to you in your new role, is not in a more positive vein.

The Committee is frankly surprised to hear that you decided earlier this week that the Ministry of Defence should not provide witnesses for our planned evidence session on the Government's contingency planning for Iranian responses to the seizure of *Grace 1*, and the effectiveness of those plans in the light of Iran's retaliatory detaining of the British-flagged *Stena Imperor*.

I understand that your decision is based on this being "a live issue with the UK-flagged tanker still illegally held by Iranian Government".

We do not find this argument at all convincing. If the seizure of the *Stena Imperor* had taken place when the House was sitting, you would have had to make a Statement or to respond to an Urgent Question, which would certainly have ranged far wider than our evidence session. We have made clear to your officials that we are focusing on the planning, not the operational aspects. Discussing how tankers should or should not have been protected has no bearing on the diplomatic problem of arranging the release of the *Stena Imperor*. We would also, of course, not press questions on anything deemed to be operationally sensitive.

We wish and expect to have a constructive relationship with you and your Department: this requires straight dealing on both sides. A similar exchange with the National Security Adviser concluded with his coming to give us oral evidence in a perfectly satisfactory manner, and we trust that we can resolve this disagreement in the same way.

Yours sincerely,

p.p. Mark E. Kenton

Rt Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP