Remarks at a UN Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting on Israeli Settlements

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AS DELIVERED

Ministers, members of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank those that came here today who are truly interested in finding a comprehensive and lasting peace to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinians, Israelis, and the region all deserve better than the situation that they face today.

I also want to take this opportunity to wish Israel a happy Independence Day. It was nearly 71 years ago when the United States officially recognized the new state of Israel. This was just 11 minutes after the new state of Israel was created by a resolution in the halls of the United Nations. A day later, a coalition of neighboring states attacked this new country – the first of several existential attacks on the Jewish state.

These countries chose not to welcome Israel, but instead to try to eliminate this small, brave country. Israel, of course, survived. And it prospered. I thought of Israel’s fragile beginnings when we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt not long ago. I thought about how far we have come.

For a country with such a tenuous beginning, it was inspiring to see its citizens exercise its vibrant democracy last month and vote for its next government, and it is inspiring to see it celebrate 71 years of independence today.

And yet today, as Israel celebrates its independence, I am also thinking about how far we have to go.

It is baffling and disappointing to see the obvious, continual anti-Israel bias here. Here we are in an Arria session to condemn Israel, in the same halls where just a few months ago, Member States failed to condemn Hamas, a known terrorist organization that just a few days ago fired close to 700 rockets at Israel – including at hospitals and schools.

Hamas’ stated goal is the destruction of Israel – plain and simple. And let’s not forget its partner in violence – the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

These terrorist groups intentionally fire missiles and mortars from densely populated civilian neighborhoods in Gaza to target Israelis and Israeli communities, and siphon the little resources of the people of Gaza to build their terror arsenal while preventing donor aid from reaching the people.

Time and again they put their own interest ahead of their own people. Yet here at the UN in December, the majority of members chose to defend Hamas rather than condemn them. It is truly shameful that in these halls there have been nearly 700 resolutions condemning actions of Israel – the region’s only real democracy – yet not one condemning Hamas’ attacks on Israelis or its abuse and neglect of the very people it purports to govern. Forget about Israel for a minute, how does that help Palestinians? Especially Palestinians in Gaza.

Forgive me for pointing out the elephant in the room, which is that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad – not Israel – are the problem here. The Israelis, as they celebrate their Independence Day, are reeling from 36 hours of unprovoked attacks on them, their families, and their homes by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Israeli parents are still comforting children who spent much of the week in bomb shelters while terrorists in Gaza attacked Israeli communities across the country’s south.

Israeli engineers spent this holiday week defusing projectiles in the streets; Israeli crews have been clearing the ruins of family homes away. Four Israelis were killed. Hundreds were wounded, dozens seriously.

Where is the urgent condemnation from this room for that unconscionable, sustained attack? Where is the sympathy and the solidarity for the people of Israel? All I hear is silence.

And what of the people of Gaza? What of the mother, the unborn child, the infant niece who were killed at the hands of Gaza-based terrorists who cynically exploited the protection of family homes and civilian neighborhoods to launch projectiles at Israelis – some of which malfunction and kill Gazans? What of the families of Gaza, who sheltered frightened for days? I don’t hear much about them here either.

Make no mistake – it is Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad who bear responsibility for these deaths too, as well as the suffering caused to Palestinians in Gaza.

The topics covered today can be part of the broader discussion between the parties themselves, but they are symptoms of the conflict. I have heard these points before, in fact, many of you have been making these same very points for years.

The sad truth is that saying the same things, repeating the same tired talking points, but not identifying a realistic way forward, has not and will not lead to peace – ever.

We need to focus on a real solution that will bring peace and prosperity to the Palestinians and Israelis and unlock opportunity for the region as well. We need to focus on a vision that will allow a comprehensive and lasting peace.

I did not hear anyone – not one of you – mention the 10 Israelis who have been murdered and the hundreds injured by Palestinians in the past year in terror attacks.

A purported topic chosen by Indonesia for today’s discussion is crimes and acts of violence committed by Israeli citizens against Palestinians in the West Bank. Fine. That is certainly an issue that the United States takes seriously. We believe that Palestinians, like Israelis, deserve to live in peace and security. This is also an issue that Israel takes seriously. Israel has investigated, and brought charges, and held trials, and judicially punished such crimes.

Israel has held the rare perpetrators of violent and extremist acts accountable. And those acts are widely condemned by Israeli leadership and Israeli society.

In contrast, the Palestinians – even the official media sites of Fatah, laud Palestinian murderers as martyrs.

Palestinian leadership name schools, parks, and streets after terrorists who have murdered Israelis. Here, the UN can’t agree to condemn Hamas, but we’ve also never had an Arria or session of any kind focused on Palestinian terrorism or incitement.

Another critical issue that many ignore as an obstacle to peace is the Palestinian Authority’s practice of rewarding terrorists. In fact, many of you here today continue to directly support the PA budget. Some of you were quick to condemn the Israelis for objecting to the PA for paying murderers of Israelis who were convicted and in jail under the PA’s Pay to Slay program.

What would you do if a neighboring government offered lifelong bounties for the killing of your citizens? The focus should be on ending the practice of incentivizing terrorists rather than how we can support the PA budget.

So what are we achieving when we continue to gather for meetings like this, where we condemn the behaviors of Israel – who was not even invited to speak at this session, itself a surprising and unfair move, instead of looking forward and trying to come up with real solutions.

We can keep pretending that meetings like this will improve lives and make peace, but they won’t. Let’s stop pretending that settlements are what is keeping the sides from a negotiated peaceful solution. This farce and obsessive focus on one aspect of this complicated conflict helps no one.

Showing a video like that at the beginning of this session, in isolation with little context, is shameful and is propaganda. Nothing more. Moreover, you will not properly learn about this conflict inside this chamber, and certainly not from political speeches.

Instead of 700 rockets and missiles, we’re talking about 700 resolutions. Nearly 700 resolutions that this body has passed condemning, and isolating, and seeking to shame the State of Israel over the decades, as it grew from a small brave country that was attacked days after its formation, to the thriving, diverse, economically-vibrant democracy that Israel is today.

Instead of seeking accountability for Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, terrorist groups that seek to blackmail the Israeli people through mass violence while putting the lives of the Palestinians of Gaza at risk, we are rehashing tired talking points, some 20 years old.

We share the goal with many of you here today of actually bringing about peace.

The vision for peace that we will soon put forward will be realistic and implementable, but it will require compromises from both sides. Our team has attempted to look at these issues with a fresh perspective. We have recognized the current reality, but also what remains possible.

It is a serious effort to lay out the core issues of the conflict in enough detail that everyone will be able to imagine what peace could look like. This is the right package of compromises for both sides to take in order to leave the past behind and try to start a new chapter where there can be tremendous hope and opportunity in the region.

It seems it would be in the best interest of everyone in the room to support the parties to get together and to get behind this opportunity.

If there is going to be any deal, the parties themselves have to make it and we do no favors for anybody pretending otherwise. We genuinely hope both the Israelis and Palestinians will take a real look at our vision for peace when we release it, before any unilateral steps are taken.

We hope to present our vision soon. And in the meantime, we will continue to speak the truth, even when it is not welcome.

The truth is that Israel, just days ago, came under a vicious, cynical, unprovoked attack that was intended to terrify, kill, and maim Israelis.

The truth is that there has been no effort in the halls of the United Nations to hold the terrorists who perpetrated that attack accountable. No meaningful steps to demonstrate sympathy or solidarity for Israel.

The United States is committed to identifying a realistic path to peace. We are committed to building better lives for the next generation of Israelis and Palestinians. This path is hard, but necessary.

The truth is that today, on Israel’s Independence Day, the United Nations Security Council has chosen to dwell in the comfort of 700 paper resolutions. And it has failed to confront the challenge of 700 very real dangerous weapons of war.

It is time for a new approach.