U.S. State Department Press Briefing on anti-Israel "Commission of Inquiry" Report

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**QUESTION:**Great. Thanks and welcome back, and I hope that this room is as hospitable for you as California —

**MR PRICE:**It always is.

**QUESTION:**— and Philadelphia were. I was going to begin with Iran, but since your colleague at the White House has already addressed it, and I’m not really interested in you repeating the same thing that she already said – but maybe my – some of my colleagues are – but I’m going to start with something different, and that is that you will have seen that the human – UN Human Rights Commission of Inquiry released its first report to the General Assembly today on Israeli activities in the Palestinian territories. And I’m wondering if you have a response – a reaction to what the findings of that report are.

**MR PRICE:**We’ve – Matt, we’re – we’ll take a close look at that report. It has just been released so can’t offer a line-by-line analysis at this point. But what I can tell you is that we have made our concerns about this Commission of Inquiry clear from the start. Israel is consistently unfairly targeted in the UN system, including in the course of this Commission of Inquiry. Israel is the only country that’s subject to a standing country-specific agenda.

When we re-engaged with the Human Rights Council last year and later when we were elected as a representative to the Human Rights Council, we did so knowing that the council has tremendous potential. It’s precisely why we wanted to engage and ultimately why we did re-engage, but we also recognize that there are needed reforms. This is an effort that we continue to work towards to see to it that Israel is not unfairly singled out – and I use that term unfairly – put emphasis on that. No country – the record of no country should be immune from scrutiny, but no country should also be targeted unfairly, and that’s the principle that we seek to uphold.

**QUESTION:**Okay. So you – are you aware of the findings?

**MR PRICE:**Again, the team will go through it.

**QUESTION:**Okay.

**MR PRICE:**I don’t have a specific reaction to offer at the time.

**QUESTION:**Well, let me give you a very brief outline of what some of them are. And let’s just set aside whether or not the commission in itself is unfairly targeting Israel or not. It very well may. I’m not going to make a – I’m not taking a – I’m not making an argument on either side of that. But what it accuses Israel of doing is occupation, de facto annexation, forcible displacement; in other words, things that are very similar, if not the exact same, as what you accuse Russia of doing in Ukraine.

Just last week, both the United States and Israel voted in support of a resolution condemning the Russians for these things. And so I’m wondering how you square the two: whether the commission itself – the creation of the commission – is unfair or not, the allegations that it’s making are very similar to allegations that you say are credible and true in the case of Russia and Ukraine. And so what’s the difference?

**MR PRICE:**First, Matt, when it comes to the report that was just released, again, we will go through it. We’ll go through it carefully and thoroughly, and we can offer more feedback on the specific assertions at that time. So I’m not going to go into the specific assertions.

But what I will note is that we categorically reject the blanket comparison between the actions of the Kremlin – Russia in this case – that has launched and waged a brutal war of aggression against another sovereign state, a sovereign state that posed and poses no threat whatsoever to the Kremlin, a military campaign that has – whose toll can be measured in thousands upon thousands of lives lost, a campaign that has been condemned, as you alluded to, by countries around the world – 141 countries in the case of the March vote in the UN General Assembly; 143 countries in the case of the annexation that Moscow recently announced and attempted with the four regions in sovereign Ukrainian territory.

Matt, when it comes to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, this administration believes deeply in a two-state solution. It is – it has been at the core of the approach that successive American administrations have taken to this conflict. We believe that only through a negotiated two-state solution can we arrive at a situation where we can have what really is our ultimate goal, and that is a reality in which Israelis and Palestinians alike enjoy equal level – excuse me – equal levels of security, of prosperity, of opportunity, of democracy, and crucially of dignity. And that’s something we’re working towards.

**QUESTION:** Right. But the Palestinians and their supporters would argue that what you accuse Russia of doing in Ukraine, in terms of war of aggression, is very similar to what is going on in the occupied West Bank. And so I guess the – I’m trying to find what you find is different. Because obviously Russia contests those allegations that you make against it, whether they’re right or not. Israel contests the allegations that are being made against it in this report, and by others, including human rights groups that you cite repeatedly when it comes to Ukraine, when it comes to Iran, when it comes to other places. Is the difference that Ukraine is a sovereign state, in your view, and that Palestine is not?

**MR PRICE:** That is a key difference. You point to some of what critics are saying. Look, no country is or should be immune from criticism. That, of course, includes Israel. Some of the criticism that we’ve heard – and we’ve, of course, offered our own over the course of recent months – is justified. Much of it is not. And so when you point to comparisons in criticisms, I think it is important to take a step back and to recognize the profound differences between those two situations. You mentioned one of them, and it is a paramount difference.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Well, listen, it’s not me that’s making – the chairwoman of the Commission of Inquiry – okay – is a respected person —

**MR PRICE:** There are many assertions around the world that are made that —

**QUESTION:** She is the one who pointed out that just last week 143 countries, including the United States and Israel, voted to condemn Russia for its actions, not me. So sorry if you —

**MR PRICE:** I know —

**QUESTION:** I guess I’m repeating the point that she has made and not —

**MR PRICE:** You’re asking the question and I’m making the points.

**QUESTION:** But let me just follow up on that point. So with the

‘ issue of the linkage. You said there is absolutely no linkage, no comparison whatsoever. Do you dispute that the Palestinians are militarily occupied, that Israel has annexed Palestinian land? Do you dispute that? Do you dispute that they have forcibly removed populations? Do you dispute that? Do you have any other different kind of information that can convince the world that you’re speaking to that this – these tactics you cited are, in fact, are not – that’s not what the Palestinians are experiencing?

**MR PRICE:** Said, we’ve spoken to the reality, to the plight that Palestinians face.

**QUESTION:** I don’t want – I’m sorry, Ned. I’m not talking about the plight and reality and so on. Do you dispute that they are militarily occupied?

**MR PRICE:** We don’t dispute that. And we’ve been clear about that this historical fact that —

**QUESTION:** Okay. Do you feel that this military occupation should also end?

**MR PRICE:** — the West Bank has been occupied since 1967.

**QUESTION:** Right.

**MR PRICE:** Our – that is why at the center of our policy is the recognition that only through a negotiated two-state solution can we achieve what Palestinians seek and what Israelis seek, and that is a reality in which Israelis and Palestinians enjoy equal levels of these virtues, of these elements – security, prosperity, democracy, freedom, and dignity. That’s what a two-state solution can bring about. Just as we have acknowledged historical realities and realities on the ground, we’ve also acknowledged, as did – as have previous administrations, that we’re not there yet, clearly, in terms of a two-state solution or even in terms of creating a constructive atmosphere in which the two sides can sit down together and attempt to make progress towards that reality of a two-state solution.

That is why this administration from the earliest days has focused on practical measures that can provide some benefit to the Palestinian people, and you can measure those practical measures in the hundreds of millions of dollars – verging on a billion dollars over the course of this administration – in terms of humanitarian support to the Palestinian people. It’s why we have maintained our sacrosanct commitment to Israel’s security, knowing that if Palestinians feel opportunity and Israelis feel security, those are conditions that can help galvanize efforts to advance a two-state reality. We’re going to continue working on that. We’re going to continue to set the stage so that we can ultimately seek to make progress.

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