**Remarks at a UN Security Council Open Debate on the Middle East**

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AS DELIVERED

Every month, this Security Council convenes a meeting on the Middle East. We have lots of meetings on specific countries and conflicts in this region. But this debate is our opportunity to talk about the Middle East as a whole. This is our opportunity to look at the threats that go beyond one country’s borders – the threats that affect not just every country in the Middle East, but all too often, every single one of us.

Regrettably, these monthly meetings routinely turn into Israel-bashing sessions. That’s the way this Security Council has operated for years. It’s a formula that is absurdly biased against one country. It’s a formula that is painfully narrow in its description of the conflicts in the region. And it’s a formula that does nothing to help find solutions.

The truth is, these Security Council meetings don’t do anyone in the region any favors, least of all the Israelis and the Palestinians. These meetings do nothing to bring the parties closer together. They actually work to push the two sides apart.

The United States firmly believes that peace is possible between Israel and the Palestinians, and we are actively working toward that goal. Peace will only come from direct negotiations, not from one-sided Security Council meetings and one-sided resolutions.

These biased discussions on the Middle East also impose a real cost. Threats are evolving, and do not fit neatly within borders. By limiting itself, the Council ignores the pressing threats that are right in front of us.

We should be asking these monthly Middle East sessions to talk about the factors that cause conflict across the region. I thank Nickolay for his remarks today and the fact that he went beyond the usual Israel-bashing and touched on the broader issues plaguing the region. I will do the same, and I encourage other countries to do the same as well. By breaking out of old, familiar, counterproductive patterns, we might actually achieve something valuable.

If we are speaking honestly about conflict in the Middle East, we need to start with the chief culprit: Iran and its partner militia, Hizballah. Iran and Hizballah conspire together to destabilize the Middle East, and their actions are expanding. For decades, they have committed terrorist acts across the region. Today, they prop up Bashar al-Assad’s brutality, fighting alongside his forces, adding to the killing of thousands of civilians and the misery of millions of refugees. They train deadly militias in Iraq and arm Houthi militants in Yemen.

While this Council has paid too little attention to this growing menace, the United States will not. We are going to speak up about Iran and Hizballah, and we are going to act against their lawlessness.

In Lebanon, Hizballah, a terrorist organization, uses towns to shield its arsenals of tens of thousands of illegal rockets. In Syria, Hizballah controls territory on the ground. With Iran’s instructions, its militias stand side by side with Syrian troops as they slaughter the Syrian people.

Sometimes, Hizballah is the one giving orders to Assad’s fighters. Hizballah helped Assad starve and destroy Aleppo. According to press reports, when supporters of the Syrian regime die in battle, they sometimes come back with Hizballah flags on their coffins. As one activist said recently, “Hizballah designs it, and the Syrian regime wears it.” They are reportedly even recruiting Syrian children to join pro-Hizballah youth groups, so they can indoctrinate a new generation, in a new country, with its toxic ideology.

Hizballah is a terrorist group spreading its influence across Middle East with the backing of a state sponsor. Iran is using Hizballah to advance its regional aspirations. They are working together to expand extremist ideologies in the Middle East. That is a threat that should be dominating our discussion at this Security Council.

The United States is not waiting to respond. We have imposed targeted sanctions on Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard and its Ministry of Intelligence for their support of the Assad regime. We recently designated for sanctions members of Iranian-backed terrorist organizations in Bahrain.

Iran remains a designated state sponsor of terror, and we continue to enforce all sanctions related to Iran’s support for terrorism and destabilizing activities in the region. The United States will work even harder with our partners and allies to disrupt Iran’s support for militant and terrorist groups.

All UN Member States must live up to their obligations. Iran’s ballistic missile tests defy Security Council resolutions and further undermine the stability in the region. We call on all states to fully implement Resolution 2231, which bans the transfer of weapons to and from Iran, as well as the arms embargoes against the Houthis in Resolution 2216 and for Lebanon in Resolution 1701.

The United States will work closely with our partners to document and address any actions that violate these resolutions. We must take a stand against Iran and Hizballah’s illegal and dangerous behavior.

How one chooses to spend one’s time is an indication of one’s priorities. The same is true for the United Nations Security Council. The Israel-Palestinian issue is an important one, deserving of attention. But that is one issue that surely has no lack of attention around here. The incredibly destructive nature of Iranian and Hizballah activities throughout the Middle East demands much more of our attention. It should become this Council’s priority in the region.

I thank you.