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

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Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you, Nikolay, for the briefing that you gave.

During the past year, as the representative of the United States, I have most often taken the position that this monthly session on the Middle East is miscast. As I’ve pointed out many times, this session spends far too much time on Israel and the Palestinians and far too little time on the terrorist regimes and groups that undermine peace and security in the region, chief among them Iran, ISIS, Hezbollah, and Hamas. That remains my view. And I expect that in future months I will continue to focus on those threats from the Middle East that draw too little attention at the UN.

However, today I will set aside my usual practice. Today, I too will focus on the issue of peace between Israel and the Palestinians. What has changed?

The events of the past month have shed light on a critical aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian problem, and it is important that we do not miss the opportunity here at the UN to bring attention to it. The aspect I will address is the single most critical element to achieving peace. No, it’s not the issues of security, borders, refugees, or settlements. All of those are important parts of a peace agreement. But the single most important element is not any of those. The indispensable element is leaders who have the will to do what’s needed to achieve peace.

Real peace requires leaders who are willing to step forward, acknowledge hard truths, and make compromises. It requires leaders who look to the future, rather than dwell on past resentments. Above all, such leaders require courage. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was such a leader.

Forty years ago, President Sadat did an exceptional thing. Egypt and Israel were still in a state of war. In fact, Sadat himself had led Egypt in war with Israel only a few years before. But Sadat made the courageous decision to pursue peace. And when he made that decision, he went to Jerusalem and delivered a speech before the Israeli Knesset. That he went to the Knesset was courageous in itself.

But what took real courage was what he said there. Sadat did not go to Jerusalem on bended knee. He spoke in no uncertain terms about the hard concessions he expected from the Israelis. And then he said the words that both he and the world knew marked a turning point. He said to the Israeli legislators, “You want to live with us in this part of the world. In all sincerity, I tell you, we welcome you among us, with full security and safety.”

“We used to reject you,” he said. “Yet today, I tell you, and declare it to the whole world, that we accept to live with you in permanent peace based on justice.”

These were the words that led to peace between Egypt and Israel. It was not an easy process. It took another 16 months of tough negotiations to reach a peace treaty, and both sides made difficult compromises. But Sadat’s words helped make Israel understand that it had a partner with whom it could make those painful compromises. Some have said these were the words that got Anwar Sadat killed. But no one can question that generations of Egyptians and Israeli citizens have enjoyed a peace that has stood the test of time.

Compare those words to what Palestinian President Abbas said to the PLO Central Council 11 days ago. In his speech, President Abbas declared the landmark Oslo Peace Accords dead. He rejected any American role in peace talks. He insulted the American President. He called for suspending recognition of Israel. He invoked an ugly and fictional past, reaching back to the 17th century to paint Israel as a colonialist project engineered by European powers.

Once more, let’s contrast Sadat’s words with Abbas’. President Sadat acknowledged that some Arab leaders did not agree with him. But he told them it was his responsibility to, “exhaust all and every means in a bid to save my Egyptian Arab People and the entire Arab Nation, the horrors of new, shocking, and destructive wars.”

President Abbas also acknowledged criticism from other Arab leaders – and he, too, had a message for them. His response was “Get lost.” Curiously, President Abbas’ speech has gotten little attention in the media. I encourage anyone who cares about the cause of a durable and just peace in the Middle East to read President Abbas’ speech for yourself.

A speech that indulges in outrageous and discredited conspiracy theories is not the speech of a person with the courage and the will to seek peace.

Despite all of this, the United States remains fully prepared and eager to pursue peace. We have done nothing to prejudge the final borders of Jerusalem. We have done nothing to alter the status of the holy sites. We remain committed to the possibility and potential of two states, if agreed to by the parties.

Just as it did with Egypt, peace requires compromise. It requires solutions that take into account the core interests of all sides. And that is what the United States is focused on for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hate-filled speeches and end-runs around negotiations take us nowhere. Ultimately, peace will not be achieved without leaders with courage.

King Hussein of Jordan was another such leader. In 1994, he ended 46 years of war and entered into a peace agreement with Israel that holds to this day. When King Hussein signed the peace treaty, he said this: “These are the moments in which we live, the past and the future. When we come to live next to each other, as never before, we will be doing so, Israelis and Jordanians, together, without the need for any to observe our actions or supervise our endeavors. This is peace with dignity; this is peace with commitment.”

I ask here today, where is the Palestinian King Hussein? Where is the Palestinian Anwar Sadat? If President Abbas demonstrates he can be that type of leader, we would welcome it. His recent actions demonstrate the total opposite.

The United States remains deeply committed to helping the Israelis and the Palestinians reach a historic peace agreement that brings a better future to both peoples, just as we did successfully with the Egyptians and the Jordanians. But we will not chase after a Palestinian leadership that lacks what is needed to achieve peace. To get historic results, we need courageous leaders. History has provided such leaders in the past. For the sake of the Palestinian and Israeli people, we pray it does so again.

Thank you.