Settling Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Would Help Curb Terrorism, Says UN Middle East Envoy

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Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would help counter the extremism behind the “abhorrent terrorist attacks" in Paris, Beirut and the Sinai, a senior United Nations official on the Middle East peace process said today, referring to last week’s bloody attacks and the downing of a Russian plane in Egypt last month.

“These tragic events serve to reinforce the reality that the extremism and terrorism that has infected many parts of the Middle East is not constrained by borders,” Special Coordinator on the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov told the Security Council in the latest UN update on the situation.

“It can strike anywhere, anytime, and poses a grave threat to international peace and security. Against this backdrop we cannot separate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from this global threat. Establishing a Palestinian state, while addressing Israel's substantial security concerns, would yield major dividends not only for Israelis and Palestinians alike, but for the entire region.”

Referring to the recent upsurge of violence in Israel and the West Bank, he noted that over the past month, there were 35 reported attacks, including stabbings or attempted stabbings, shootings, or car-rammings by Palestinians against Israelis, leaving six Israelis dead and 36 injured, while 25 suspected Palestinian assailants had been killed.

Mr. Mladenov, speaking to the Council via videoconference, called on all parties to implement steps to end the violence, including “immediate efforts by all political, religious and community leaders to stop the hate-fuelled incitement that glorifies the murder of Jews or that brands all Palestinians as terrorists.”

The status quo on the major religious site in Jerusalem that houses the El Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, known as Haram-Al Sharif to Muslims and the Temple Mount to Jews, must be maintained, he said, and Israel must address the apparent impunity for settler violence against Palestinians.

He also called for bolstering security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to prevent any further deterioration of the situation, and said the use of firearms by Israeli security forces should be employed only when less extreme means are insufficient to address an imminent threat of death or serious injury.

“Dealing with the threats that kill the prospect of a two-state solution is also critical,” Mr. Mladenov warned, voicing concern at the recent Israeli decision to issue tenders for 436 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Ramat Shlomo, the first such announcement in over a year.

“The reality in which a settler state is emerging in the occupied West Bank must be reversed if hope is to be reignited.”

He called raid by Israeli forces on hospitals a “troubling development.”

“Based on developments on the ground, the current conditions make a return to negotiations a challenging prospect,” he said. “But time, as always, is not on our side. Trust must be rebuilt and, for that, bold and significant steps on the ground must be taken in order to tangibly improve lives and irreversibly move toward the end of occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

“In the period before an eventual return to negotiations, the parties and their international partners must pursue measures that will significantly improve the lives of Palestinians, including by strengthening their institutions, economic prospects and security. This will require substantial policy changes on the ground by Israel.”

He called on the Security Council to provide additional guidance on developing a new peace architecture for resolving the conflict.

“I refuse to be convinced that Israelis and Palestinians want to live ‘by the sword’ and in a state of perpetual violence,” he concluded. “We owe it to the many Palestinians and Israelis who, despite endless setbacks and disappointments, have continued to maintain hope that negotiated peace can be realised.

“I can assure you that the Secretary-General remains steadfast in his support of any effort to restore the hope that a two-state solution can be achieved through negotiations. But the long road ahead requires leadership. Leadership that has been glaringly absent to date.”