Washington Calls on UN to Ignore ‘Biased’ Gaza War Report

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The UN report into possible war crimes in last summer’s Gaza conflict should not be taken to the Security Council or used in other United Nations work, the US said Tuesday, challenging the fairness of the Human Rights Council that commissioned the inquiry.

State Department spokesman John Kirby said Washington viewed the UNHRC as having a “clear bias” against Israel, tarnishing the report released Monday, which accused both Israel and Palestinian militants of possible war crimes during a 50-day conflict last summer.

“[W]e challenge the very foundation upon which this report was written, and we don’t believe that there’s a call or a need for any further Security Council work on this,” Kirby said during a press briefing. “[W]e reject the basis under which this particular commission of inquiry was established because of the very clear bias against Israel in it.”

The UNHRC is set to discuss the report on June 29 and may vote to send it to the Security Council for further action. On Monday, Kirby said the US would not be part of that process.

When asked if the report should be referred to the International Criminal Court in the Hague to investigate the sides for war crimes, Kirby would only say that the US does not “support any further UN work on this report.”

The ICC was established by the UN, but is not directly under its aegis.

Kirby also said the US was continuing to talk with Israel regarding concerns over the military’s conduct during the summer war.

“We’ve made very clear what our issues were at the time about the use of force and we made very clear to the Israeli government our concerns about what was happening in that conflict,” he said. “We have an ongoing dialogue with the government of Israel on all these sorts of matters; that dialogue continued and continues.”

On Monday, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the administration was studying the report.

While Israel has a “right to self-defense,” the US “expressed deep concern about the civilians in Gaza that were in harm’s way [during the war]. And we urged all parties to do everything they could to protect innocent civilians who were essentially caught in the crossfire of this conflict,” Earnest said. “We await further outcomes from the Israeli government on this particular matter.”

The UN report, which found that Israeli airstrikes on residential buildings caused many civilian deaths and suggested Israeli leaders knowingly endangered them, was roundly dismissed by Israeli officials.

In a first response to the report, the Foreign Ministry said the Israeli government was in the process of examining the findings but rejected the “morally flawed” mandate given to the UNHRC to investigate the war.

“It is regrettable that the report fails to recognize the profound difference between Israel’s moral behavior during Operation Protective Edge and the terror organizations it confronted,” the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. “This report was commissioned by a notoriously biased institution, given an obviously biased mandate, and initially headed by a grossly biased chairperson, William Schabas,” the statement said, noting the UNHRC’s outsize treatment — in relation to major human rights offenders Iran, North Korea and others — of Israel’s alleged offenses.

“Israel is a democracy committed to the rule of law, forced to defend itself against Palestinian terrorists who commit a double war crime: They indiscriminately target Israeli civilians while deliberately endangering Palestinian civilians, including children, by using them as human shields,” the Israeli statement said.

The report also found “Palestinian armed groups” had shot rockets at Israeli civilians indiscriminately, a finding which was rejected by the Hamas terror group with is the de facto ruling power in Gaza.”

Israeli officials refused to cooperate with the probe and have dismissed it ever since the formation of the panel as biased and pre-written.

Schabas, the Canadian Jewish professor who initially headed the HRC panel, resigned in February amid charges by Israel of bias and was replaced by former New York judge Mary McGowan Davis.