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New York

President:	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett	(Guyana)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Bendjama
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Japan	Mr. Yamazaki
	Malta	Ms. Gatt
	Mozambique	Mr. Bambissa
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone	Mr. Sowa
	Slovenia	Mr. Žbogar
	Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

Threats to international peace and security

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The meeting was called to order at 4.05 p.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President: I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. Nicolas de Rivière, Permanent Representative of France, for his service as President of the Council for the month of January 2024. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador De Rivière and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Threats to international peace and security

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: As we are all too aware, the tensions that have engulfed multiple countries in the Middle East continue to rise. Tragically, this comes as no surprise. The Secretary-General has repeatedly warned about the risks of further escalation and miscalculation in the region since the horrific Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October and the devastating Israeli counteroffensive in Gaza.

Since early October 2023, we have witnessed near daily incidents in the region. They include some 165 attacks on United States facilities in Syria and Iraq, prompting United States strikes in the two countries. Then, on 28 January, a drone attack killed three United States service members and injured 40 at a United States base known as Tower 22, in north-east Jordan, near the Al-Tanf base in Syria. On 2 February, the United States Central Command said it had carried out 85 air strikes in Iraq and Syria against reported Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Forces and affiliated groups.

Syria and Iraq condemned the 2 February strikes, with both Governments claiming they had resulted in deaths and injured civilians. The United States said it had targeted command and control operations, intelligence centres and weapons facilities, among other sites, and that it was not seeking conflict in the Middle East or elsewhere.

While the Iraqi Government has continued to repeat its commitment to protecting United States and coalition forces inside Iraq, some armed factions linked to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq have pledged to continue their attacks against United States and coalition forces in the region.

The wave of violence since early October involves a large swath of the Middle East. The Israel Defense Forces and Hizbullah, along with other non-State armed groups in Lebanon, have exchanged fire across the Blue Line on an almost daily basis since 8 October. There has been repeated rocket fire over the occupied Golan between Israel and militias reportedly linked to Iran, as well as air strikes attributed to Israel by the Government of Syria on multiple locations in Syria.

Ongoing Houthi drone and missile attacks and threats to navigation in the Red Sea are deeply worrisome and risk both exacerbating the conflict and further impacting international trade, as companies divert ships away from critical maritime routes. A report on Houthi attacks on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea will shortly be before the Council, in accordance with resolution 2722 (2024).

Since 11 January, the United States and the United Kingdom, with the backing of six other Member States, have launched strikes on Houthi positions in Yemen. Strikes occurred consecutively over the past three days. More than 36 targets, across 13 locations, were reportedly struck on 3 February, including what was described as underground storage facilities, command and control sites, missile systems, unmanned aerial vehicle storage and operations sites, radars and helicopters. An additional missile launch site was reportedly hit on 4 February. Today sites in Al-Hudaydah were also targeted, including some very close to United Nations offices on the ground.

I reiterate the Secretary-General's call on all parties to step back from the brink and to consider the

unbearable human and economic cost of a potential regional conflict.

It has been nearly five months since more than 1,200 Israelis were killed in the attacks by Hamas, with over 250 people taken hostage. As the Secretary-General said, this has been a period of heartache and anguish for Israelis. I echo the Secretary-General's call for the immediate and unconditional release of all the hostages. The past five months have also been heartbreaking and catastrophic for Palestinian civilians in Gaza, where hunger is rampant, disease is spreading and shelter is squalid at best for a vast number of people. The death toll in the Strip is reported to have surpassed 27,000, mostly women and children. Thousands more are reported missing. The civilian population of Gaza should not pay for the terror unleashed by Hamas. I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

The risk of escalation in the Middle East and the potential consequences thereof were obvious from 7 October. A quick survey of the agenda of the Council explains why: the United Nations is supporting political and peace processes throughout the region in countries emerging or still suffering from armed conflict. The Middle East remains highly volatile. Long-term regional stability demands the implementation of a clear political road map in each of those situations.

The Secretary-General continues his extensive outreach to all key stakeholders to urge all parties to take concrete measures to de-escalate tensions and to work towards sustainable political solutions that aim to resolve, rather than merely manage, long-standing conflicts. I appeal to the Council to continue to actively engage all concerned parties in order to prevent further escalation and the worsening of tensions that undermine regional peace and security.

The President: I thank Ms. DiCarlo for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing. We heard quite a lot of hubris from her, but we did not hear the main thing from her, of course — namely, a condemnation of the violation of international law by the United States and the United Kingdom.

We would like to thank the Guyanese presidency for swiftly convening today's meeting of the Security Council under the agenda item "Threats to international peace and security", which we initiated in order to discuss another unlawful and irresponsible act by the United States in the Middle East region. That action comes against the backdrop of an escalation of violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict with an unprecedented number of casualties — a conflict in which Washington is playing far from a secondary role.

On the night from 2 to 3 February, the United States, using four tactical bombers of the United States Air Force, F-16s, and two supersonic B-1B Lancer strategic bombers, carried out at least 85 so-called retaliatory strikes on the sovereign territory of Iraq and Syria. The mass airstrikes by the United States Air Force, as a result of which civilians and soldiers died, destroyed and damaged dozens of facilities, once again demonstrating the aggressive nature of United States policy in the Middle East and Washington's complete disregard for the norms of international law.

The participation of the British Royal Air Force in the United States attacks should give no one the illusion that there is some sort of international coalition in place. London still has to answer for its zealous support of the serious provocative attacks of its big brother in Washington. As in the ongoing attacks against Yemen, the actions of the Anglo-Saxons pose a direct threat to international peace and security. They undermine the world order based on the primacy of universal international law and the central role of the United Nations.

Perhaps, that kind of mob-like action is part of the so-called rules-based order. In a recent interview, former Australian ambassador to Iran, John Lander, said that the rules-based order "is a set of ever varying, constantly vacillating rules devised by the United States for the benefit of the United States and its Western allies", adding that "one of the most difficult things about the rules-based order is finding out what the rules are". Inasmuch as the United States and its allies benefit from and advocate for that order, using it to justify their attacks on Iraq and Syria, it is becoming ever clearer that that pseudo-legal American construct has little to do with international law.

It is clear that United States airstrikes are specifically and deliberately aimed at further stoking the conflict. They targeted the positions of the Syrian

Army in the east of the country, mainly in the province of Deir ez-Zor, where the Syrian Army continues to fight the remaining Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) combatants, whom Washington, contrary to its statements, is covering for and mentoring. By recently attacking the targets of allegedly pro-Iranian groups in Iraq and Syria, the United States is trying to expand this regional conflict to the largest countries in the Middle East.

At the same time, representatives of United States Central Command stated that their so-called operation was coordinated with the Iraqi authorities. However, in a statement by the Iraqi authorities, the actions of the United States are characterized as another "blatant aggression" and a violation of Iraq's sovereignty, and Washington's information about the alleged coordination of strikes with Baghdad was described as an "intentional deception" that was "crafted to mislead international public opinion and evade legal responsibility". It is clear that the presence of the United States-led international anti-ISIL coalition in Iraq has become a threat to the country's security and stability, as well as an attempt to involve it in regional and international conflicts.

Washington, enjoying its impunity, continues to sow chaos and destruction in the Middle East. The largest United States air operation in the region since 2003 — presented by Joe Biden as an act of retaliation for an attack with the use of uncrewed aerial vehicles of unknown origin on a United States base that is in Syria illegally — has no justification. We primarily see, in those attempts to flex their muscles, the desire to influence the domestic political situation in America and to salvage the image of the current American Administration in the international arena in the light of the upcoming presidential election campaign. Moreover, the fact that those acts could lead to a further escalation of international tensions and have led to the death of civilians is not of concern to Washington strategists.

Recent events confirm that the United States is not looking for and has never really sought solutions to the problems in the region. The logic of their actions can be found only in the effort to preserve their hegemonic position in the world at any cost. Therefore, Washington has tried and will continue to try to fight fire with fire and compound the chronic disagreements within the Middle East to the extent that doing so is beneficial to its Israeli ally. It is pointless to trust the American establishment to show any good sense or to be willing to take into account the interests of the countries of the region. On 2 and 3 February, we saw that once again.

We decisively condemn the new brazen act of aggression by the United States against a sovereign State, which has created further risks and increased the level of instability in a region already on fire. It is clear that that incident, which we are here to discuss today, only increases the regional tensions caused by the unprecedented violence in the Gaza Strip, where Israel's inhumane bloody operation has been going on for four months now, and which the United States and its satellites are covering up with all their might, including by blocking the Security Council's efforts to impose an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

Ultimately, we can clearly see that the escalation of violence has already gone far beyond the occupied Palestinian territories, not only crossing to the border between Israel and Lebanon, but also spreading to the Red Sea and Yemen. It is clear that unilateral acts of violence by Washington and its allies only worsen the chaos in the region, nullifying international efforts to re-establish peace in the Middle East and to find a just solution to the Palestinian question.

We call on the international community to unequivocally condemn those senseless acts committed by Washington and its allies in the Middle East, which violate the sovereignty of Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Sowa (Sierra Leone): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting. We also want to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her informative briefing. We welcome the participation of the Permanent Representatives of Syria, Iran and Iraq in this meeting.

Sierra Leone is deeply concerned about the recent developments in the Middle East around the killing of three United States military personnel in Jordan on Sunday, 28 January. We strongly condemn the unprovoked attack and the killing of the three troops. However, the attacks have led to retaliatory air strikes by the United States on targets in Iraq and Syria. While we note the provision of the Charter of the United Nations on the right to self-defence, which permits States Members of the United Nations to respond to such unprovoked attacks, we urge for a measured response, in line with international law. We particularly urge all the parties involved to work for calm and de-escalation in order not to worsen tensions

or further jeopardize the stability of the region. The attack on United States personnel and the subsequent response have the potential to escalate or to be used as a pretext to escalate the ongoing conflicts in the region. While there can be no justification for the unprovoked attacks and the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, the war and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza nonetheless loom large in the region. In that context, Sierra Leone reiterates its call for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza and for a dialogue among all relevant stakeholders in the region in order to avoid further military escalation. We urge all parties to prioritize the welfare of civilians and pursue de-escalation through a diplomatic and peaceful settlement.

We are calling for de-escalation with the aim of avoiding a spillover of the conflict in Gaza to the wider Middle East. As has already been alluded to, we are seeing serious incidents in the Red Sea and Yemen as well as rising tensions along the border between Israel and Lebanon. In the light of those developments, Sierra Leone urgently calls on the relevant stakeholders and parties to work with the United Nations in a spirit of cooperation, humanity and diplomacy in order to prevent a further deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation in the Middle East.

In conclusion, Sierra Leon calls for de-escalation and a renewed commitment to the principles of international law, to the peaceful resolution of conflicts and to restraint in taking action that could further worsen insecurity and human suffering. Let us strive collectively to promote stability and enduring peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing. We welcome the presence of the representatives of Iraq and Syria at this meeting, and I look forward to hearing further details in their statements later on.

The recent United States air strikes on multiple locations in Syria and Iraq have caused heavy casualties and constitute a grave violation of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and Iraq. The United States has indicated that related military operations will continue, and China is seriously concerned about the situation. We oppose any action that violates the Charter of the United Nations and infringes on the territorial sovereignty and security of other countries. As we speak, the situation in the Middle East is on the verge of spiralling out of control. The international community is confronting the urgent task of easing tensions and preventing any further escalation of conflict. As we face this complex situation, we must be clear about our answers to the following questions. Who is creating threats, in the Middle East or elsewhere? Who is engaged in the excessive use of force? And who is misleading public opinion? With regard to those issues, we must respect the facts, uphold justice and abide by our principles. It is simply wrong to let the loudest voice set the tone or the strongest fist have the final say. In fact, the recent developments have already frankly answered those questions.

Regarding the topic under discussion, the United States claims that its actions were in response to the attacks on its military and to safeguard its own security. Iraq and Syria, however, have already expressed their strong rejection and condemnation of those actions. The United States claims that it is not seeking to create conflict in the Middle East or anywhere else, but it is in fact doing exactly the opposite. Its military actions are undeniably stoking new turmoil in the region and further ramping up tensions. History has repeatedly shown that military means are not a solution and that the excessive use of force can lead only to greater crises. The United States actions will undoubtedly exacerbate the vicious cycle of tit-for-tat violence in the Middle East, of which we have seen too many examples in the past.

We urge the parties concerned to remain calm, exercise restraint, abide in good faith by the Charter of the United Nations and international law, respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries, cease illegal military operations and prevent tensions in the region from further escalating or even spiralling out of control. It must be underscored that the fundamental reason for the rising tensions in the Middle East over the past few months has been the failure to implement a ceasefire in Gaza. China has repeatedly emphasized that an immediate ceasefire in Gaza is a critical and overriding prerequisite for accomplishing anything else and a top priority for international diplomatic efforts. All the parties should heed the firm call and overwhelming consensus of the international community and support the Security Council in resolutely taking action to promote an immediate ceasefire, save lives, alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe and contain any spillover of the conflict. We call on the country concerned to display political will and determination, take more practical steps to safeguard regional peace and stability,

refrain from selfish geopolitical calculations and play the constructive role that we expect of it.

The world today is becoming increasingly dangerous, and international peace and security are facing grave challenges. We are standing at a critical crossroads. The fate and future of our world are at stake. We believe that in a world that is dealing with interconnected changes and chaos, we must maintain our sense of community and vision for a shared future for humankind, and fully acknowledge that all countries have a common destiny and interdependent future. We are all in the same boat. The security of one country cannot be achieved at others' expense. Every country must remain committed to maintaining common security, achieving common development and building a common future. We must adhere to true multilateralism, preserve the core role of the United Nations, build a multipolar world with equality and order, promote inclusive and universal economic globalization and work together to build a world of lasting peace and universal security.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, and Guyana on presiding over the Security Council for February, and to assure you of Algeria's full support. I also want to express our admiration for Ambassador De Rivière and his able team's successful presidency of the Council last month. Our appreciation also goes to Ms. DiCarlo for her insightful briefing.

The Middle East is standing on the precipice of collapse. The air strikes targeting Iraq and Syria over the past weekend are likely to exacerbate an already precarious situation and could lead to further escalation. In that context, we affirm our steady support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of both Iraq and Syria. Our brother peoples of Syria and Iraq deserve to live in peace and prosperity. In the light of those critical circumstances, we encourage restraint and the avoidance of any escalation. The region cannot bear the burden of additional tensions. We firmly believe that force is not and never will be a path to peace and stability. History attests to the fact that force causes only ruin and instability and furthers animosity. Today we are urging for dialogue and collective action to bridge differences and foster shared prosperity. Let us set aside the notions of violence, deterrence and punishment and work hand in hand for a peaceful Middle East.

Genuine stability in the Middle East demands that we comprehensively address the root causes of instability. We must invest in long-term solutions that can prevent further suffering and pave the way for lasting peace in the region. A just resolution of the Palestinian question is the cornerstone of that endeavour. From the outset of the aggression against the Palestinian people, particularly in the Gaza Strip, my country, Algeria, has sounded the alarm on the risk of a regional spillover on many occasions. Regrettably, the situation has become a devastating reality and compels us to redouble our efforts to halt the potential escalation across the region. The peoples of this region, like every citizen of the world, yearn for peace, development and prosperity. It is high time for the cradle of civilization to reclaim its stability. The initial step towards that goal lies in an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing.

The United Kingdom fully supports all efforts to maintain and enhance international peace and security, including in Iraq and Syria. We are committed to de-escalating tensions in the Middle East. We condemn the multiple attacks that Iran-aligned militant groups have made since October 2023 on the global coalition against Da'esh and on Iraqi military bases in Syria and Iraq. Despite warnings, the strikes have continued and intensified, with an attack on 28 January killing three American personnel and injuring many more. We fully support the right of the United States to self-defence and to respond.

Da'esh continues to pose a grave threat to those countries and to the wider region. Last month it conducted its biggest attack in years in Iran. Its ability to direct, enable and inspire attacks continues to represent one of the world's most significant terrorist threats. The sole objective of the global coalition, of which the United Kingdom is a leading member, is to counter Da'esh. The United Kingdom remains committed to working with its counter-terrorism partners in Iraq and Syria in order to tackle the threat from Da'esh and prevent its resurgence. Iran's political, financial and military support to militant groups is destabilizing the region and threatening our collective ability to counter Da'esh. We therefore call on the regime to rein in those groups and act now to prevent further attacks by its proxies and partners in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. As I said earlier, we are committed to a de-escalation of regional tensions.

The Houthis' continued attacks on commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea are illegal and unacceptable. The Council made it clear in resolution 2722 (2024) that we condemn Houthi attacks and call for them to stop. The Council has supported international efforts to enhance the protection of shipping in the Red Sea. Our actions and presence in the Red Sea are designed to protect innocent lives, preserve freedom of navigation and deter further attacks on shipping. We acted alongside our United States allies, and with the support of many international partners, in self-defence and in accordance with the rule of law. We are committed to working with all the members of the Council and the international community to protect international peace and security in the Middle East and throughout the world.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): Allow me to thank Ambassador De Rivière for France's presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I would also like to convey Malta's support to Guyana during its presidency this month.

I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing. As we have said on numerous occasions, the situation in the Middle East remains deeply concerning. We are also deeply troubled about the fact that the instability in the Middle East is being exploited by militias and armed groups in order to engage in activities that continue to compound the difficult and fragile context. The rapidly deteriorating maritime-security situation in the Red Sea is a case in point. We reiterate our call to the Houthis to immediately cease their attacks and we underline the importance of avoiding any further escalation, as outlined in resolution 2722 (2024). The navigational rights and freedoms of commercial vessels in the Red Sea are vital and must be respected and assured.

We urge all parties to combat the malign influence of all bad actors and refrain from actions that could contribute to a wider war. The importance of protecting civilian lives remains paramount. The international community and the Council must focus on working quickly to address the root causes of the region's tensions and promote pathways to a just and lasting peace, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. Acts of terrorism have often been used to exacerbate tensions, and we simply cannot allow the current very tense situation to be disrupted by people not operating in good faith. We believe that the Security Council has a key role to play in that regard, and we will continue to support initiatives to hold those spoilers to account.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing.

On 2 February, at President Biden's direction, the United States conducted precision air strikes in Iraq and Syria against Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and affiliated militia groups. That necessary and proportionate action was taken in exercise of the United States inherent right to self-defence, as reflected in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Less than a week ago, on 28 January, Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq attacked a Jordanian facility hosting United States forces taking part in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS)/Da'esh. Three United States service members lost their lives that day, and many others were wounded. This loss is devastating. This is unacceptable. And attacks like it cannot continue.

Russia called for the convening of this meeting under the false pretence that the United States has no grounds to respond to attacks that have killed United States personnel. It therefore bears repeating that the actions United States forces took on 2 February are necessary and proportionate, consistent with international law and in exercise of the United States inherent right to self-defence. We also repeatedly stated, in previous letters to the Security Council, that the United States would take further action to respond to future attacks or threats of attack against United States nationals, personnel and facilities.

These recent strikes certainly fall into that category. They are aimed at protecting and defending United States personnel, including those in Jordan, who are supporting operations against ISIS to ensure the terrorist group can never resurge. The strikes successfully degraded the capabilities of Iranian-backed militias, deterring and undermining their ability to conduct further attacks. The facility struck included command-and control-operations and intelligence centres, rockets, missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles storage and logistics ammunition supply chain facilities. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and affiliated militias have used those facilities to attack United States and coalition forces. These targets were carefully selected to avoid civilian casualties and were based on clear, irrefutable evidence that they were connected to attacks on United States personnel in the

region. President Biden has made clear that these strikes were the start of our response to the deadly attack on Tower 22, in north-eastern Jordan.

I also want to stress that these strikes are separate and distinct from the coalition strikes in Yemen, which were in response to the Iranian-backed Houthis' lawless attacks on naval vessels and international shipping in the Red Sea. Let me be clear: the United States does not desire more conflict in a region where we are actively working to contain and de-escalate the conflict in Gaza. And we are not seeking a direct conflict with Iran. But we will continue to defend our personnel against unacceptable attacks — period.

The United States and coalition forces are deployed in our shared effort to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. As we have reported in numerous letters to the President of the Security Council since 18 October, Iran-aligned militia groups have attacked those forces in Iraq, Syria and, now, Jordan, more than 165 times. Iran provided support for many of those attacks, which were similar to the one on 28 January. Many of them resulted in casualties, including among our Iraqi partners. The United States has repeatedly, and in some instances directly, warned Iran about attacks on United States personnel, yet Iran has failed to rein in its extremist proxies. On the contrary, Iran continues to escalate tensions across the region by enabling those proxies' deadly attacks. Iran cannot deny its role in enabling those attacks against United States forces, or its responsibility for this escalation.

We therefore call on every member of the Council, especially those with direct channels to Iran, to press Iran's leaders to rein in their militias and stop these attacks. They should also press the Syrian regime to stop giving Iran a platform to destabilize the region.

As President Biden has made clear, we will not hesitate to defend our personnel and hold responsible all those who harm Americans. That certainly goes for Iran and its proxies. We will therefore continue to exercise our right to self-defence at a time and a place of our choosing, and we will continue to hold Iran and its affiliates accountable for their destabilizing actions.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I too thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her timely briefing.

At the outset, my delegation expresses its serious concern about the regional escalation since the heinous terrorist attacks by Hamas and Israel's subsequent military operations in the Gaza Strip. The Houthis have continued their indiscriminate attacks on merchant and commercial vessels, jeopardizing the free flow of commerce in the Red Sea. The sabre-rattling situation across the Blue Line, between Israel and Lebanon, is ongoing. Further destabilizing this combustible situation, militant groups in Iraq and Syria have launched a series of attacks against the United States and coalition forces in the region. Even the United States Embassy in Baghdad was targeted by such rocket attacks in December of last year, and those attacks led to strikes by United States forces in response.

We call on militant groups in the region to cease their provocative actions, which undermine regional security and stability. In that regard, we take note of the measures taken by the United States to limit the risk of escalation in defending its personnel and facilities. Simultaneously, we note with appreciation that relevant parties in the region have expressed their willingness to avoid an escalation of conflict.

Over the past weekend, the United States and the United Kingdom conducted military operations in response to the continued threats posed by the Houthis despite the adoption of resolution 2722 (2024), which urges the Houthis to stop their attacks in the Red Sea.

The situation in Israel and Gaza remains grave, with a high risk of a spillover into other parts of the region. Above all, at this volatile moment, when miscalculation can unintendedly lead to a tinderbox, any attempts to politically exploit the situation and risk regional stability are unacceptable. What is needed at this juncture is to focus on and support diplomacy to enhance regional security and foster safer trade and the flow of energy.

In recent years, we have witnessed significant achievements in the political and security areas made by the Iraqi people, and those achievements need to be upheld and expanded. At the same time, as the current security and humanitarian situations in Syria remain extremely dire, the United Nations and humanitarian agencies' engagement should be ramped up to deliver live-saving humanitarian assistance. We also echo the Iraqi Government's statement that the recent regional developments not only jeopardize the global economy but also undermine regional efforts to combat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). We must not forget the unthinkable terror and cataclysm that ISIS inflicted on the region from 2014 on. And we have

seen vividly that ISIS threats remain ongoing, as the group claimed responsibility for the deadly bombing in the city of Kerman, Iran, last month. The risk of the resurgence of ISIS still remains in the region, as the Secretary-General assessed in his latest report on that topic (S/2023/568). In that connection, the recent attacks by militant groups against the United States and coalition forces threaten to undermine the ongoing efforts to combat ISIS in the region.

In conclusion, the Republic of Korea will make efforts to support diplomacy and prevent a far-reaching spillover into the region and beyond.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I take note of and appreciate the information provided by Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo. I acknowledge the presence in this Chamber of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Iraq.

My delegation expresses its concern at the escalation of violence in recent weeks in the Middle East, which poses a serious threat to international peace and security and places the lives and integrity of the civilian population at risk. The Security Council has a key responsibility in the matter and a responsibility to lay the foundations for sustainable peace in the region.

The attacks on 2 February in several cities in Iraq and Syria, in response to the assault that occurred on 28 January in Jordan, have claimed the lives of dozens of soldiers and civilians alike.

Ecuador calls for restraint from all parties and recalls the obligation to act in accordance with the provisions of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Council resolutions. Ecuador joins the Secretary-General in his calls for restraint, urging all parties involved to cease fire and promote political and diplomatic means to resolve the current critical situation. My country also encourages all efforts aimed at reducing tensions and calls on the parties to refrain from carrying out any action of any nature that would further exacerbate the delicate situation in the Middle East.

I conclude by reaffirming the urgency of also deploying coordinated efforts on a regional and global scale to strengthen the fight against terrorism, ensure the protection of civilians and prioritize efforts to guarantee access for humanitarian aid.

Mr. Žbogar (Slovenia): First, I want to congratulate you, Madam President, and your country, Guyana, for assuming the presidency of the Council for this month. We fully trust that you will be our North Star in the difficult discussions that we will have in February and that you will guide us through the month. I also want to thank France and Ambassador De Rivière and his team for their leadership during the month of January.

I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing.

With each passing day, the situation in the Middle East is becoming more volatile. We have a growing feeling of powerlessness against the increasing spillover of the Gaza conflict into the wider region. The coalition's presence in Iraq is under growing threat from intensified attacks, which could undo the progress achieved in the country. Meanwhile, the situation in Syria is deteriorating, with more violence and tension in the north-west and north-east. We are gravely concerned about the current cycle of violence, which is causing numerous civilian casualties. We wish to recall that international law must be respected by all and that the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure must be ensured at all times and under all circumstances.

We continue to believe that our best hope to stop the spiral of violence and to start restoring calm in the wider region is to restore calm in Gaza. Call it what you will, the bombing, shelling and killing in Gaza, as well as the attacks on Israel, must stop. The hostages must be released, and urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance for Gazans must be restored in full. We urge all actors in the region to exert utmost restraint and to work towards de-escalation. We also call on those countries that can exert influence on non-State groups to do so.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): Let me begin by expressing our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her informative briefing.

I have listened carefully to the explanation by the United States on the matter. Japan notes that the United States stated that it carried out air strikes against the facilities of Iran-affiliated militants and other groups in Iraq and Syria, following the attack on United States troops in Jordan on 28 January, in order to de-escalate the continued attacks by those groups. Japan is also aware that the United States does not seek a wider conflict in the Middle East or anywhere and acted on that basis.

Tensions in the Middle East are already high, and the situation on the ground is extremely volatile. The conflict in Gaza, which started on 7 October, has had serious ramifications across the region. In that context, Japan is deeply concerned that a number of non-State armed groups, militias and terrorists have been launching attacks and have signalled that they will intensify their hostile activities. Those activities cannot be justified for any reason. We call upon all parties to refrain from any kind of destabilizing actions such as the transfer of weapons, including missiles and uncrewed aerial vehicles, and other military-related technologies to such non-State actors.

No one wants to see a continuation of the cycle of violence and increasing civilian casualties. Japan remains committed to making every effort, in close cooperation with fellow Council members and other key stakeholders, to restore security and stability and to find sustainable solutions that can stop the fighting in the region. Our world is at a crossroads. We must choose the path towards peace, not war.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Given that this is our first public meeting this month, I wish to assure you, Madam President, of Switzerland's full support during your presidency. I also wish to congratulate France on its successful presidency last month. We thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing detailing developments in the region.

Switzerland is concerned by the ongoing escalation in the region since the start of hostilities in Gaza and which has reached a dangerous point with the events in the past 10 days — not only in Syria and Iraq, but also along the Blue Line and in the Red Sea. The situation in the region poses a real risk to international peace and security.

We call on all parties — as well as those with influence over them — to exercise maximum restraint to avoid further escalation. When it comes to the use of force, any action must be taken strictly in accordance with international law. Additionally, all available communication channels must be used to avoid misunderstandings. A single miscalculation could have disastrous consequences.

It is essential to calm the situation in order to achieve de-escalation at the regional level as quickly as possible. Only political solutions can bring peace and security to the entire region. In particular, a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza is necessary. With regard to Syria, Switzerland recalls that resolution 2254 (2015) calls for a ceasefire at the national level. As for the situation in Iraq, that will be discussed tomorrow when it is on the agenda of the Council. Finally, we call on all parties to respect international law, in particular international humanitarian and human rights law.

To conclude, I emphasize once again that the Council must fully play its role to contribute to a de-escalation of the situation and to political solutions to the conflicts in the region.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, Madam President, I wish to express my delegation's full support for your presidency of the Council for the month of February. I also thank Ms. DiCarlo for her statement.

France is very concerned by the current regional escalation in the Middle East. The strikes on 28 January that targeted American soldiers engaged in the fight against Da'esh on the Syria-Jordan border are unacceptable. They undermine collective efforts against that terrorist group and threaten the stability of the entire region by fuelling the escalation of violence in a worrisome manner. France has condemned those actions and expresses its full solidarity with the United States, alongside whom we have been committed since 2014. We will remain so in order to fight against the scourge of terrorism, along with the countries of the region.

France has been engaged in the fight against Da'esh since 2014, in particular alongside its partners in the international counter-Da'esh coalition. In Iraq, France will continue to support the fight against terrorism led by the Iraqi authorities, for as long as they ask, in full respect of Iraqi sovereignty. France is committed to the security and stability of Iraq, and of the autonomous region of Kurdistan within it. France condemned the attack using armed drones that was carried out against a Kurdish forces headquarters in December 2023, as well as the 15 January 2024 strike in Erbil claimed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Those actions are a violation of Iraq's sovereignty and must stop.

In Syria, we are deeply concerned by the increase in violence on all fronts. The primary victims are civilians in the north-east and north-west — and in particular in Idlib — as well as in the area controlled by the regime. These hostilities must cease, in accordance with Council resolutions. The only prospect for a just and

lasting solution in Syria is in the initiation of a credible and inclusive political process based on resolution 2254 (2015), which was adopted unanimously by the Council.

France calls on all parties to exercise restraint, in Iraq as in Syria. We must do everything to avoid a conflagration in the region. It is urgent to collectively seek ways to bring about a lasting decrease in tensions. Those who have influence over groups that threaten the stability of the region must use it to put an end to this escalation and find a path to peace in the region, from Yemen to Lebanon, including Iraq and Syria. Iran has a heavy responsibility in that regard. We continue to warn Iran against any attempt at regional escalation and ask it to immediately cease its destabilizing actions. France, for its part, will continue to work to prevent a regional conflagration.

Mr. Bambissa (Mozambique): Mozambique thanks the Guyanese presidency for convening this urgent meeting. We are grateful to Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, for her insights on the topic under consideration.

The situation in the Middle East has been addressed by the Council on many occasions. Today we come here deeply concerned about the recent developments in the region, which include military confrontations that threaten peace and security not just in the region but also in the entire world. The recent retaliatory attacks in Yemen, Syria and Iraq are such an example. They aggravate the current cycle of confrontation and war that already prevails in the region. These attacks are likely to escalate tensions, with negative spillover effects in the entire Middle East and beyond. It is our view that, at all times, Member States are bound by the Charter of the United Nations, which compels them to settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that peace, security and justice are not endangered.

These attacks took place at a time when the United States of America, Qatar and Egypt were engaged in diplomatic contacts with the aim of ending the devastating and bloody war between Israel and Hamas. In that connection, we echo the Secretary-General's viewpoint that, as the hostilities between Israel and Hamas and other groups in Gaza intensify, there is a risk of further spillover of this conflict, with devastating consequences for the entire region.

Faced with mounting tensions in the Middle East, it is important for all parties involved to urgently de-escalate the tension, avoid armed confrontation, engage in a meaningful, responsible and constructive dialogue and work towards a peaceful long-term solution. We need to promote a solution that addresses the root causes of the prevailing conflict in the region. As the Security Council, our mandate requires us to pull together our efforts in that direction by following the path of dialogue and diplomacy so as to achieve peace and stability in the region and in the world.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Guyana.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for the information provided. We value the assessment of the United Nations and welcome the Organization's continued monitoring of the situation. I also acknowledge the presence of the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

My delegation is gravely concerned about the precarious situation prevailing in the Middle East and the potential for a wider regional conflagration. Such a risk must concern us all. Guyana condemns the attacks that resulted in the deaths of three United States servicemen. We are concerned at reports of civilian losses in the response that has ensued. We consider it important that no effort be spared to avert new threats and provocations that could further inflame tensions in a region already besieged by conflict and a worsening humanitarian crisis. Guyana urges due caution in responding to those challenges. We call upon all parties to respect international law, including international humanitarian law, and the principles of the United Nations Charter. We urge due respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

Guyana further considers that the Council must not relent in the search for solutions to the current security challenges in the region, not least the situation in Gaza, nor in efforts to avert a broader, destabilizing regional conflict. In that regard, Guyana reiterates its call for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, where unprecedented numbers of Palestinians have been killed since 7 October. The Council must unite to bring peace to Palestine and Israel, and an end to this human tragedy.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on the election of your friendly country, Guyana, as member of the Security Council and on its presidency of the Council for this month. We wish you success in this endeavour.

My delegation thanks the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation for requesting this urgent meeting in response to the grave aggression committed by the United States Administration against the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic and the brotherly Republic of Iraq at dawn on Saturday. That aggression constitutes a threat to regional and international peace and security and a blatant violation of international law, international humanitarian law and the purposes and principles of the United Nations, and must be condemned and denounced by the Security Council.

The United States aggression led to the martyrdom of 37 civilians and military personnel and seriously injured 34 others, as well as the destruction of several residential buildings in which many families live, a school and multiple civilian facilities and vehicles. Even historical sites were not spared from the aggression which targeted the ancient Al-Rahba Citadel.

We have heard today the same flimsy pretexts and misleading claims that the United States Administration is promoting in an attempt to justify its repeated acts of aggression, including by presenting a distorted interpretation of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, especially Article 51, and ignoring the fact that the occupier has no right to self-defence and that the root causes of the conflicts, suffering and instability in our region are caused by the wrongful and destructive policies of the United States and its blind and unlimited support for the Israeli occupation entity and its brutal crimes, including the ongoing crime of genocide against the Palestinian people for more than 120 days, together with the United States investment in terrorism by supporting Da'esh, Al-Nusra Front/Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other terrorist groups and separatist militias, as well as by spreading chaos and destruction.

Through its statements and official letters, my country's Government has sought to urge the Security Council to uphold its responsibilities with regard to the repeated acts of aggression and serious violations of international law that have been committed by the United States of America against the sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and independence of the Syrian Arab Republic. Of course, one statement before the Security Council is not enough to list all the United States violations, as successive United States Administrations have exploited their responsibilities as a permanent member of the Security Council and have been interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, including my country, Syria, forming illegal military coalitions outside the umbrella of the United Nations and international legitimacy, perpetrating acts of aggression and occupation, exerting pressure and blackmail, punishing and suffocating peoples with unilateral coercive measures and inhumane and immoral blockades. All those violations are based on the law of force over the force of the law.

Unfortunately, the successive United States Administrations have obstructed the work of the Security Council and paralysed its ability to carry out the basic responsibility entrusted to it by Member States to maintain international peace and security. Those Administrations have guaranteed that their agents in our region — foremost of which are the Israeli occupation authorities and terrorist organizations and militias — can continue perpetrating the most heinous crimes with impunity.

The Syrian Arab Republic completely rejects all the pretexts that the United States Administration is trying to use to justify its aggression, which is aimed at protecting its agents in the region, including Da'esh, Al-Nusra Front/Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other associated terrorist entities, groups and separatist militias. Those agents would not have continued their crimes against the Syrian people without the multifaceted support provided to them by the United States and its allies.

Syria also categorically rejects the transformation of the territories of Member States and the blood of their people into a platform for the United States election campaigns and for unleashing a brutal force that undermines the values of law and justice and the principle of collective security on which the United Nations was founded.

Syria affirms that the United States brutal aggression, which is accompanied by repeated Israeli attacks on Syrian territories and the crimes of terrorist organizations and separatist militias, will not deter it from continuing its quest, by all legitimate means,

to liberate all its territories from the illegal foreign military presence, eliminate terrorism, restore State authority and the rule of law and ensure the security and well-being of the Syrian people.

In conclusion, my country demands that the United States Administration abandon its erroneous and destructive policies in the region and put an end to its illegal military presence on the Syrian territories, the suffering it causes to Syrians as a result of its inhumane coercive measures, the plundering of national wealth and the support it provides to terrorist organizations and separatist militias. My country also stresses that the United States Administration must refrain from causing further escalation in our region at a time when the overwhelming majority of United Nations Member States are working to stop the war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide that the Israeli occupation authorities are committing against the Palestinian people, as well as Israel's repeated attacks on the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic and other Arab territories.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al-Fatlawi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Her Excellency Ambassador Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, Permanent Representative of Guyana, on her country's assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I would like to thank the delegation of France for its efforts last month as President of the Council. I also thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing in this meeting.

We appreciate the call to convene a meeting of the Security Council today, given the current circumstances in the Middle East region, as Iraq is aware that the crises in our region are interconnected. Iraq has already warned that the escalation and serious developments in the region will lead to grave repercussions in the Middle East, expand the scope of the conflict and undermine regional and international peace and security.

The Government of the Republic of Iraq maintains a balanced foreign diplomacy based on the principle that Iraq maintains strong foreign relations at the regional level and with the international community, thereby ensuring its pioneering and natural role in the region and the world. That approach is reflected in the regional and global openness of Iraq.

Over the past years, Iraq has sought to be a source of stability at the regional and international levels and to have balanced relations with all countries, including neighbouring countries, based on the principles of good neighbourliness, mutual interests and respect, non-interference in the internal affairs of States and respect for State sovereignty. Iraq stresses the need to not export the domestic problems of countries to the outside world, as that will undermine the stability and security of the entire region and negatively impact its economic conditions. Through pragmatic diplomacy, Iraq has been able to bridge the gaps and bring together proponents of opposing policies in the region.

Every now and then, Iraq has been subjected to repeated acts of aggression by certain friendly, allied and neighbouring countries. It is surprising that relations between the Government of Iraq and those States and their Governments are privileged. However, those acts of aggression, which undermine Iraq's sovereignty, security and territories, are not in line with the nature and level of those relations.

While we reaffirm our concern to protect and strengthen those bilateral relations, we condemn and categorically reject all the attacks against several areas of Iraq's territories, which have led to many civilian martyrs and injured and have caused damage to private and public property, all under futile and illogical pretexts.

Those attacks are violations of Iraqi sovereignty and territorial integrity. They seriously threaten its security and people and run counter to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Iraq rejects any type of attack against Iraqi military bases and will not allow anyone to push us into the conflict that is ravaging the region. We will not allow Iraqi territories to be used for settling scores or promoting contradictory policies.

Iraq strongly condemns the attacks carried out on the night of 2 February by the United States targeting Iraqi military positions, which led to dozens of martyrs and injured among our military personnel and civilians. That was a grave attack on an official Iraqi security facility. It was a violation of Iraq's sovereignty and security and of international laws and norms that govern relations among States.

In conclusion, we reiterate that it is important for the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities, maintain international peace and security, protect the

sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, address all violations and adhere to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to congratulate Guyana, a newly elected member of the Security Council, for its presidency this month. We acknowledge France for the successful completion of its presidency in January. I would also like to extend my congratulations to the other elected members: Algeria, Sierra Leone, the Republic of Korea and Slovenia.

We appreciate Russia's request to convene this meeting under the agenda item "Threats to international peace and security" in order to address the persistent violations by the United States of international law and the Charter of the United Nations in the region.

We welcome the presence of Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo in this meeting.

Iran strongly condemns the military attacks of the United States in the territory of Syria and Iraq. This United States military action is illegal and unjustified and blatantly violates the basic norms and principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, particularly Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter. It is also a flagrant breach of Iraq's and Syria's territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence.

Iran also strongly condemns the joint military actions of the United States and the United Kingdom against Yemen, which constitute an obvious violation of the United Nations Charter and international law. Furthermore, they openly abused resolution 2722 (2024). Those illegal actions, which targeted civilians and vital infrastructure, jeopardize regional peace and security and pose a serious threat to international peace and security.

The United States and the United Kingdom must bear international responsibility for their commission of the crime of aggression. The argument and justification invoking Article 51 as a basis for that aggression lacks a solid legal foundation and cannot legitimize those illegal actions.

Today in the Chamber, the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom made another desperate attempt to divert attention away from the root cause of the current situation in the region by falsely putting the finger and blame on Iran. It is regretful that the United States, a permanent member of the Security Council, has failed to fulfil its obligations under the United Nations Charter. The United States expressed grave concern about the spillover of tensions in the region even as it continues to play a destabilizing role in the region.

The United States continues to occupy Syrian territory, loot Syrian property and resources and support separatists and terrorist groups. Furthermore, people in Syria are experiencing economic hardship and a humanitarian crisis as a result of the hostile and harmful actions of the United States, as well as its application of illegal sanctions.

All those measures violate international law, the United Nations Charter and related Security Council resolutions. The Syrian Arab Republic has officially and frequently raised objections to those violations, calling on the Security Council to halt the violations and put an end to the United States occupation.

In Iraq, following its unlawful military intervention in 2003, the United States and the so-called "coalition" ignored Iraqi opinions and aspirations and continued their illegal activities and presence under the guise of fighting terrorism. The United States and NATO must respect the Iraqi Government's decision to terminate their military presence and withdraw their forces from the country.

All of the resistance groups in the region are independent, and their decisions and actions are motivated by their legitimate rights under international law: ending the illegal presence of the United States on their territories, stopping the genocide in Gaza and ending the occupation of the Palestinian territories. Therefore, any attempt to attribute those actions to Iran or its armed forces is misleading, baseless and unacceptable.

Iran never seeks to contribute to the spillover in the region. Iran has no military presence in Iraq, nor does it have bases or military advisers there. In Syria, Iranian military advisers are legally present only because they were officially invited by the Syrian Government to fight terrorism. Claims that Iran's bases in Iraq and Syria were attacked are rejected as unfounded and are regarded as attempts to shift attention away from the aggressive actions of the United States.

Iran has never sought to bring its dispute with the United States into Iraqi territory and remains committed to Iraq's independence, national sovereignty and territorial integrity. That is the principled position of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It is evident to everyone that the root causes of the current situation in the region are occupation, aggression and the continued genocide and horrific atrocities committed by the Israeli regime and fully supported by the United States against innocent Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The military attacks of the United States against the Muslim nations of the region are a continuation of that country's complicity in the genocide of the Palestinians through its all-out support of the occupying regime and its blocking of any effective international action to hold that regime accountable.

While more than four months have passed since the occupying regime's genocidal attacks on the oppressed people of Palestine, the United States has not only actively cooperated with the Israeli regime in the genocide of the Palestinians, but is now attempting to divert the international community's attention away from the genocide of the Palestinians through an escalation of tensions in other parts of the region.

We believe that the only solution to end the conflict in the region and prevent the spillover of the war is to for everyone to return all to their obligations under international law — that is, to force Israel to stop the genocide in Gaza, to establish an immediate ceasefire, to end the presence of United States forces in Iraq and Syria and to exert pressure to end the occupation of Palestinian territory by the Israeli regime.

Instead of blaming others and simply urging restraint from other members, the United States must force the Israeli regime to halt the genocide in Gaza and comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law. Likewise, the United States must end its obstruction of the Security Council in order to allow the adoption of the draft resolution proposed by Algeria, focusing on the ceasefire in Gaza. That approach aligns with the broader goal of restoring peace and stability in the region while addressing the humanitarian concerns at hand.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that if Iran faces any threat, attack or aggression affecting its security, national interests or people, it will not hesitate to exercise its inherent rights, under international law and the United Nations Charter, to respond firmly.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.