

Idlib: Allow Turkey and opposition groups the space and time to separate out the terrorists

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Thank you Madam President and I join my colleagues in expressing our condolences and solidarity with you, with your Mission, with all our American friends and the citizens of this great city of New York for the losses of 9/11 and to all those countries who like my own lost their own nationals in the attacks.

Speaking as someone who worked very closely with the American and other governments on the aftermath of 9/11, I think I can say we will never forget that day and we will never cease to stand alongside you in the fight against terrorists and the unwavering campaign to protect our societies and defend civilians. The attacks of 9/11 came without warning out of a clear blue sky. The horror of Syria has been unfolding before us for more than six slow years. After 9/11, Russia and Iran worked with us. We urge them to work with us now to halt the attacks and protect the civilians of Idlib.

There have been many inflection points that have come and gone on Syria. The Astana meeting, one would like to think, was another inflection point that would succeed and I think it's very important that we can have this discussion and this debate today.

We will soon hear from our Turkish colleague who we welcome to the Council but I wanted to say right at the start that we strongly agree with President Erdogan and this morning he wrote in the Wall Street Journal that Assad's solution to countering terrorism is a false one. He said that the plan to militarily attack Idlib will only create new hotbeds of terrorism. ISIS was an outcome and not the cause of what is happening in Syria. We face a choice, Madam President, between an Assad-Russian military assault on Idlib in which, as many colleagues have said today, thousands of civilians will die. We've seen from eastern Aleppo and eastern Ghouta what that looks like the killing of children, attacks on schools and hospitals, even ones in deconflicted areas, the barbaric use of chemical weapons - or we allow Turkey and opposition groups the support space and time to separate out the terrorists and tackle them themselves.

Turkey has a plan, Madam President, in Idlib and it does involve reaching an agreement with the Syrian opposition whereby the regime refrains from attacking them while they combat terrorism. This is what we should be discussing today, Madam President, but I think it has been absent from the briefing we received from Russia just now.

We would like also to talk about how we can get together through Astana or another grouping that works to work out how the regime can work with the opposition to bring security and stability back to Idlib and I would like to know why the Council can't spend time discussing how to build on the work of Astana to this end. This would not only, Madam President, provide a plan to rid the area of extremists but it would also provide the beginnings of a model to discuss the political process to resolve this conflict which has gone on too long.

Every speaker today has talked about the importance of there being no alternative to a political solution. Of course we agree with that but the UN Special Envoy has told us that progress on a political solution is impossible if there is a military assault on Idlib. So I would like to know from Russia and Iran that they will heed those words, that they will stop the military operations, that they will come to the Council and discuss with all of us including Turkey how exactly we can build on Astana to engage seriously to finally, six years after the worst horrors we have seen in war since the Second World War, how we can bring that to an end and how we can get a political process underway in Syria and I would be grateful to hear from Russia and Iran how exactly we can bring that about.

Thank you Madam President.

Second intervention:

Thank you very much Madam President. I will be brief but I wanted to thank the Turkish Representative for setting out again the Turkish plan. We've listened very carefully, all of us, to the Astana briefers. We don't want to detract from the efforts of Astana. We support

any move that gets the political process underway but we've only heard one plan today for trying to avert the bloodshed in Idlib and actually make a difference on the ground.

I would urge all Council members to rally to the plan that our Turkish colleague has set out. What worries me is that instead we've heard a narrative that restoring full Syrian control over its territory is synonymous with fighting terrorists and for the people of Idlib that isn't the equation.

The people of Idlib are going to suffer terribly if this military assault goes ahead. It is precisely for these situations that the doctrine of proportionality under International Humanitarian Law exists. So I hope, Madam President that the Council can come together over the coming days to talk further about how we can maximise the political process building on Astana's efforts but also have a very serious discussion about how we can avert an all-out military attack on the people of Idlib.

Thank you.

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