Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"Peace for many people in the Middle East remains a remote prospect and a distant memory."

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Thank you Madam President, and thank you Nikolay very much for your briefing.

As you have set out, peace for many people in the Middle East remains a remote prospect and a distant memory.

Two weeks ago, we saw a horrific chemical weapons attack on Khan Shaykhun in Syria. Environmental samples from the site have tested positive for sarin. We are now almost certain that the Syrian regime carried out the attack using sarin. The Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) yesterday confirmed that their incontrovertible evidence indicates exposure of victims to sarin or a sarin-like substance.

The UK Government supported the US action in response and we hope it will deter any further barbaric chemical weapons attacks. But, when the moment came for this Council to show leadership after the attack, we failed. We were stopped by one Council member; who would rather prop up Asad than seek justice for the victims. We will not be deterred by Russia’s veto. We will continue to press in this Chamber for accountability. The international community owes it to the people of Syria.

Any attempt to tie the hands of the investigators will be defeated, just as the Iranian-Russia proposal at the OPCW today was defeated.

As you said, Madam President, we must remember the interplay among the various conflicts in the Middle East region. And for a start, we must not let up in our efforts to defeat Daesh in Iraq, in Syria, elsewhere. The United Kingdom supports Prime Minister al-Abadi and his Government in their fight against Daesh, and in their efforts to build a stable, secure, and unified Iraq.

Madam President,

Iran continues to play a destabilising role in the region. This is most clearly seen in Syria. Iran has violated its obligations under international humanitarian law in Syria failing to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid into Eastern Aleppo, as it was besieged. Iran continues to provide substantial military and substantial financial support to Hizballah and to the Syrian

regime. As the Secretary-General's last report makes clear, the leader of Hizballah stated that Iran supplies all their weapons and missiles.

Senior Iranian individuals listed under this Security Council's resolution 2231 continued to flout the travel ban imposed by this Council. For instance, Major General Soleimani was pictured in Aleppo in September in a show of support to the Syrian regime. These actions demonstrate that Iran chooses to complicate, not extinguish, a conflict that has continued for far too long.

Madam President,

This year marks fifty years since the Six Day War. This year either we move towards peace, with the strong support of the region and the international community, or we face an uncertain and dangerous future. Unless the parties show leadership, including the willingness to make tough compromises, the risk of terrorism and instability will increase. Israelis and Palestinians cannot afford another fifty years of that.

The UK's longstanding position on the Middle East Peace Process is clear: we support a negotiated two-state solution leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and a just, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

However that vision grows distant. As the British Foreign Secretary said last month the UK strongly condemns Israel's decision to found a new settlement deep in the West Bank; the first such decision for over 25 years. Such announcements are contrary to international law and seriously undermine the prospects of two states for two peoples. As a strong friend of Israel, and one prepared to stand up for Israel when it faces bias and unreasonable criticism, the UK urges Israel not to take steps, which move us away from our shared goal of peace and security.

It was because of our support for the two-state solution, and commitment to Israel as the Jewish homeland, that we voted for resolution 2334. But we recognise the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is deeply complex, settlements are not the only obstacle to peace. The people of Israel deserve to live free from the scourge of terrorism and anti-Semitic incitement, which as the Quartet report sets out, undermine the prospects for a two-state solution.

It is critical that the Palestinian leadership implement the recommendations of the Quartet Report and continue their efforts to tackle terror and incitement, strengthen institutions, and develop a sustainable economy.

We must continue to press Israelis and Palestinians to refrain from actions which make peace more difficult. It's because the conflict between Israel and Palestine is one of the

central issues in the Middle East that the UK supports a regional approach to peace. The changing regional context, the Arab Peace Initiative, and converging Arab and Israeli interests do present an opening.

We recognise that impetus is needed and we welcome President Trump's interest in working for a deal that meets the requirements of both parties. The UK's view remains that the two-state solution is the best way to achieve this and is ready to do all that we can to support this.

We do not underestimate the challenges, but if both parties show leadership, peace is possible.

Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/peace-for-many-people-in-the-middle-east-remains-a-remote-prospect-and-a-distant-memory