



Statement by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia at UNSC debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

18 April 2024

Mr. President,

We thank Secretary-General for his briefing.

For seven months now, the Middle East has been engulfed in a violent conflict that has already claimed the lives of more than 34,000 civilians in Gaza. The escalation is spiraling daily, spreading to other countries of the region, for whom the threat of a full-scale armed confrontation has started to loom for the first time in decades.

Today's meeting is a good opportunity to assess what the international community has and has not been able to do to resolve this crisis.

First and most importantly, has the UN Security Council, as its mandate suggests, demanded an immediate ceasefire from the parties? Yes, in resolution 2728, formally for the period of Ramadan, which has already expired, but with a transition to a sustainable and lasting ceasefire. In order to do that, China and us had to veto a draft American resolution aimed precisely at precluding a ceasefire. Was the Council able to monitor the implementation of that decision and enforce it on those who ignored it? No it was not. Did it happen because we did not try hard enough? Such an assertion would be absolutely false. Since October 7, 2023, the Council has spent days and nights discussing draft products aimed at stopping the violence in Gaza. In total, delegations have proposed 10 different draft resolutions, which is quite a lot. As early as October 16, Russia put forward the first draft resolution on a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, which was voted against by France, the UK, the US and Japan. The next draft - submitted by Brazil on October 18 - was single-handedly vetoed by the United States, although it contained such an important, as American colleagues now claim, language about condemning Hamas. Can you imagine how many lives could have been saved if those proposals had been supported then, including the lives of the hostages whose release we also demanded at that time?

Since then, Washington has used the veto three more times to prevent the Security Council from taking a decision that would have stopped the Israeli military operation in Gaza. American colleagues have made no secret of the fact that they see the UN Security Council as an obstacle that should not "get in the way" of their "effective diplomacy on the ground." Their actual purpose was to give their main Middle Eastern ally a free hand for "cleansing" the enclave. We well remember, and hope that the rest of the Security Council has not forgotten either, how the US delegation demanded that the slightest mention of the need to end the violence be blotted out from any draft.

Colleagues, every American veto on Gaza is not just a piece of statistic for UNSC votes. We must not forget that it also has a concrete and terrible price – the lives of thousands of civilians in Gaza.

It took Washington six months to finally realize that it had lost all leverage over Israel and ended up in a situation where "the tail was wagging the dog" - when Tel Aviv was actually dictating its terms, demanding unconditional American support for any of its reckless decisions.

Then in March this year, already deplored by almost everyone in the international community for its inhumane uses of veto, the United States proposed, in an attempt to "whitewash" itself, an extremely strange draft resolution that philosophically "defined" a certain "imperative" of a ceasefire without actually demanding it. At the same time, the document was packed full of dangerous "mines" and "catches" that actually gave a "green light" for further Israeli military operations, including the "cleansing" of Rafah. As I said, us together with Chinese and Algerian colleagues could not allow the Council to approve such a "license for continued killing" of Palestinian civilians. And thanks to that, three days later the Security Council was able to adopt the document I mentioned, put forward by the Council's E10, demanding a ceasefire for the period of Ramadan.

Now the United States hypocritically blames Russia and China for vetoing their "perfect" draft. In reality, our veto is an example of why the veto instrument is required and, at the same time, a response to those who demand its cancellation. Veto is needed to prevent unbalanced and cunning decisions promoted by Washington.

Unfortunately, Israel has blatantly ignored UNSC resolution 2728, with encouragement from the US, which was quick to call it "non-binding." As a result, a situation has arisen that forced Francesca Albanese, UNHRC Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the oPt, to state that "the threshold indicating the commission of the crime of genocide has been met." At the same time, she said that statements of the Israeli leadership about alleged compliance with international humanitarian law, right to self-defense, and the fight against terrorism were a "humanitarian camouflage".

Now my next question. Have we collectively managed to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza? Once again, we are at a disadvantage. The Council adopted two "humanitarian" resolutions - 2712 and 2720 - but in the absence of a sustained ceasefire, they remain on paper, as we had warned. Humanitarians cannot work amidst active hostilities. They are unarmed, unable not only to help the civilian population but even to defend themselves.

Once again, contrary to the American disinformation, both of these resolutions, as well as resolution 2728, contained measures aimed at protecting the humanitarian personnel, but they cannot be implemented without a ceasefire. Israel's cleansing of Gaza has already set a historic anti-record for the death toll of UN humanitarian personnel - more than 240 people have been killed, including 178 UNRWA staff - and the cleanse is not over yet. Israeli military has been hitting humanitarian convoys, blocking access, slowing down the passage of supplies. Western countries criticize them fiercely only if such actions kill Western citizens. All calls for deconfliction, which is based on the goodwill of field commanders, are empty and will not really change anything in the plight of humanitarian workers on the ground unless there is a functional ceasefire regime.

Finally, my last question. Has the international community been able to stop the "spread" of the escalation throughout the region? Again, the answer is no. The situation along the Lebanese-Israeli border is extremely unstable. Lebanon and Syria are constantly bombarded by Israel. Through the fault of our Western colleagues, namely, the United States, Britain and France, the Council failed to condemn the Israeli strike on the Iranian consular facility in Damascus on April 1 and thereby reaffirm the sacred foundation of the pillars of international relations - the inviolability of diplomatic and consular facilities and personnel. That triggered a new, extremely dangerous round of regional escalation, with completely unpredictable consequences. This disdainful attitude of the West towards certain states and their rights, dividing the world into friends, who stand above the law, and foes, whose legitimate interests can be ignored, has brought the Middle East to the brink of a major war. This is what your "effective diplomacy" is like, dear Western colleagues. The "fruit" that is bears is casualties and destruction.

Summing up, what is it that we have? The international community has failed (because of the position of one State, which has blocked all our efforts) to protect the Palestinians from the Israeli slaughter. Nor has it been able to alleviate their humanitarian suffering. Nor has it been able to stop the spiral of violence. Not to mention the fact that, since 1948, it has been unable to help the Palestinians gain full statehood.

Having delivered his fiery speech (the content of which we already know by heart), Israeli Ambassador did not find time to listen to the other members of the Security Council and the Arab (and not only) ministers who arrived here. The Israeli Permanent Representative has a lengthy record of insulting statements about the UN and its personnel, as well as the Secretary-General himself. Today he did not hesitate to call the Security Council a "Terror Council". Only he must have forgotten that the State of Israel itself was created on the recommendation of this Council and by a resolution of the General Assembly. Isn't he going to call this decision in question too? Or will he answer if Israel met the criteria for membership when it was admitted to the UN?

A small piece of history. I will read out a letter from the Chairman of the Membership of the Security Council to the President of the Security Council, dated December 6, 1948.

"The Security Council Membership Committee has discussed Israel's application for admission to membership of the United Nations,

As a result of its discussions, the Committee came to the conclusion that it was not at present in possession of the requisite information to enable it to come to any decision. In particular, it was pointer out in the Committee that the General Assembly itself had not yet reached any conclusion on the Palestine question as a whole.

The USSR and Ukrainian delegates declared, however, that for their part they saw no reason whatever for delaying Israel's admission to the United Nations. The Syrian delegate, on the other hand, expressed his opposition to the application for admission, and added that the application did not merit consideration.

The Security Council Membership Committee has instructed me to apprise the Council of the above. The Committee considers that it will be for the Security Council to decide at the proper time whether to refer the matter back to the Committee or take a decision itself."

And then, on March 7, 1949, President of the Security Council issued a letter which transmitted to the General assembly a draft resolution on Israel's admission to UN membership.

So the minimum that we can and are morally obliged to do here and now is to honor Palestine's request for UN membership. It has come a long and painful way for that goal, and since 2012 has had the unique status of a non-member Observer State at the UN. There is only one step left before it becomes a permanent Member State. We call on all UNSC members to vote in favor of the draft resolution, proposed by Algeria on behalf of the Arab group.

We are convinced that recognizing the status of Palestine as equal to Israel will contribute to a long-term settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the well-known international legal framework approved at the United Nations and reinforced by the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

In the first place, this is about creating an independent, contiguous sovereign Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace and security with Israel. It is clear that moving towards that goal requires the launching of a collective diplomatic mechanism, along with efforts towards resolving the pressing humanitarian issues that we have mentioned. We are convinced that an important role in that mechanism should be played by the countries of the region, Arab and Islamic states, who understand no worse but rather better than others how to achieve a just solution based on the international legal framework.

This, of course, does not rule out the essential importance of a ceasefire in accordance with resolution 2728. In case it fails to be implemented, the Council has the power to sanction violators and saboteurs of its decisions. We will return to this issue in the very near future.

Thank you.