

Statement for the Record
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Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to testify on the conflict in Gaza. I'm honored to be joined by my colleague from the Department of Defense, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Dana Stroul.

While I am here today to talk with you all about the conflict in Gaza, I want to take a moment to underscore the urgency of advancing the President's full supplemental assistance request, including \$3.5 billion in FMF for Israel, \$200 million in State Department operational funds to meet the needs of embassy security and U.S. citizen services in this crisis, and \$10 billion in global humanitarian assistance, which is crucial to provide life-saving aid to Palestinians but also to stabilize the region, where our aid supports millions of refugees and IDPs in Lebanon, northwest Syria, Jordan, Turkey, and Yemen.

I returned on Monday from two weeks in the region, where I joined Secretary Blinken for meetings with our Israeli and a number of Arab partners. These engagements were aimed at demonstrating U.S. support for Israel's self-defense, consistent with international humanitarian law, including the requirement to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians; preventing the conflict from spreading; securing the release of Hamas's hostages, including American citizens; and addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The Secretary urged Israeli leaders to work humanitarian pauses into their campaign — stopping military operations in a specific area, for a specific amount of time — to allow for more critical aid to get into Gaza, to enable civilians to access that aid and move to safer locations, to further the release

of hostages. He also underscored the U.S. commitment to pursuing a negotiated two-state solution as we look toward the post-conflict period. A two-state solution is the best, the only way to achieve a just, durable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a way that protects Israel's security and fulfills Palestinian aspirations to a state of their own.

We met with regional partners, who, like us, see Iran and its proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen working to exploit this crisis, and are determined that they not do so to expand the conflict. As we made clear, , we will not stand by idly if others, whether state or non-state actors, join the conflict or escalate it.

The terrorist attack Hamas carried out on October 7 was the worst attack on Israel since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, but no prior conflict targeted Israeli civilians to this extent. In Israel, I saw partners I have worked with for decades shaken in a way I have never seen. Many said it evoked the trauma of the Holocaust.

At the same time, how Israel conducts this war matters deeply. The United States stands unequivocally for the protection of civilian lives during conflict. We mourn the thousands of Palestinian civilians killed in Gaza and the West Bank. They must not suffer the consequences for Hamas' terrorist acts. As the Secretary said in Israel, "there will be no partners for peace if they're consumed by humanitarian catastrophe and alienated by any perceived indifference to their plight."

Support for American Citizens

In support of U.S. citizens, the Department has had a task force operating 24/7 since October to coordinate U.S. government efforts to protect them, as well as our diplomatic personnel and facilities. Over 14,000 U.S. citizens and family members have departed Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza since October 7th. Some 1,500 of those departures were directly facilitated by the U.S. government.

Since November 1, more than 400 U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, and their family members have exited Gaza via the Rafah crossing. Nearly all Locally Employed staff of U.S. Embassy Jerusalem, and their families, have also departed. There are still about 600 U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, and their relatives in Gaza requesting assistance to depart, and we are making every effort to enable their departure in coming days.

Securing the release of U.S. nationals taken hostage by Hamas is an overriding concern for this Administration, and we appreciate Qatar's forthright and tireless assistance in this effort. The Secretary has instructed our Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, Roger Carstens, to do everything possible to advance these discussions. He has the support of our embassies in Cairo and Jerusalem.

Support for Israel

In support of Israel's right of self-defense, we are expediting U.S. materiel transfers to ensure it has the means to do so. The President submitted to the Congress a supplemental budget request seeking \$14.3 billion in critical security and diplomatic assistance resources for the State Department and Department of Defense (DoD). We trust this can pass without sacrificing other government services.

Preventing a Widening Conflict

To prevent a wider conflict, our message is clear – Iran and its proxies should stay clear of it. We are concerned also about the stability of the West Bank. Secretary Blinken discussed with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas the critical role that Palestinian Authority Security Forces play in preventing conflict in areas under their control, and we have seen serious work in that direction since October 7. We have also urged Israel to uphold the rule of law and rein in extremist settler violence in the West Bank, which has led to the displacement of at least 828 Palestinians from their homes in 15 different communities in the West Bank since October 7. Even before the start of the latest crisis, extremist violence against Palestinians in the West

Bank was up 300 percent from last year – 1,373 incidents in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between January 1 and October 1 this year. This violence inflames an already explosive security environment.

Humanitarian Efforts

President Biden appointed Ambassador David Satterfield – one of our most seasoned career diplomats – as his special envoy to lead a whole-of-government campaign to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. As a result of U.S. leadership, over 560 truckloads of food, medical, nutrition, shelter and other life-saving supplies entered Gaza from Egypt via the Rafah crossing since October 21, and more is on the way.

We also have urged Israel to restore access to electricity and water, and to allow in sufficient levels of fuel required for desalination, distribution of humanitarian goods throughout Gaza, wastewater treatment, medical care, and basic daily activities for civilians in Gaza. Special Envoy Satterfield is working tirelessly on these issues, in coordination with our embassies in Cairo, Jerusalem and Doha, the UN, and our regional partners.

The United States has committed \$100 million in humanitarian aid to Gaza, and the President’s supplemental request seeks over \$10 billion to address humanitarian needs worldwide, including resources to ensure the Department of State and Agency for International Development can continue the provision of life-saving efforts.

Global Leadership

Our partners in the region and around the world are scrutinizing – and criticizing -- our response – as are our strategic competitors. After years of false narratives claiming the United States is abandoning the region, we are demonstrating we will stand resolutely by our ally, uphold our values, and advance an affirmative vision of a peaceful and more prosperous future. As others offer hollow statements or try to drive a wedge between us and our

regional partners, it is the United States that is engaged in the hard-nosed diplomacy of finding solutions.

But we must be clear-eyed about what lies ahead. The Secretary heard last week from our regional partners – and their people – that their imperative is the immediate protection of Palestinian civilians, thus the unstinting calls for a ceasefire. They do not believe Hamas will be destroyed. They worry about regional escalation. They fear the irreparable displacement of the Palestinian people and destruction of lives and property. They want to know how much political capital the United States is willing to invest toward a two-state solution. And they want U.S. leadership on all of these issues.

I will close by thanking this Committee for your continued support. The Biden Administration is poised to work with you to hold Hamas accountable, to prevent widening of the conflict, and to protect civilians. We cannot return to the environment before October 7 – for either Israel or the Palestinians -- which posed an unacceptable security risk to Israel, left over 2 million Palestinians at the mercy of Hamas, left unresolved the legitimate aspiration of Palestinians for a state of their own, and threatened regional stability and core U.S. interests. I look forward to answering your questions.