



Statement by

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At

The General Debate

Of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York

September 28th, 2019

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Excellency Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande,

President of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly,

I would like to congratulate you on your election as president of the current session of the General Assembly and wish you every success in the future. I would also like to thank your predecessor for her important role as president of the previous session.

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet today at a moment when the picture might be bleak globally. The foundations of global political, economic, legal and security relations are facing their greatest threat since the establishment of our Organization. Conflicts and threats to international peace and security are on the rise. The prospects of war far exceed those of peace. The fate of a balanced global economy has become uncertain. Violations of international conventions and treaties have become the norm, while the unbridled use of illegal measures under international law, such as supporting terrorism and imposing economic embargos, have gotten out of hand. All of this only creates chaos across the world, gradually replacing the rule of law with the law of the jungle, jeopardizing the future of our countries and forcing our people to pay the ultimate price, sacrificing their security, their stability, their wellbeing and their lives.

We stand today at a crossroads. Are we going to work in good faith to build a more secure, stable, and just world? A world free from terrorism, occupation, and hegemony? A world based on international law, a culture of dialogue, and mutual understanding? Or, are we going to stand idly by despite everything, leaving the future of our people and future generations hanging in the balance and flouting the principles and goals set forth by the founding fathers of our Organization? This is the question that you, Ladies and Gentlemen, must answer.

Mr. President,

Terrorism remains one of the main threats to international peace and security and a danger to all without exception, despite the extraordinary achievements we have made in Syria thanks to

the sacrifices and heroism of the Syrian Arab Army and the support of our allies and friends. Our people have suffered for more than eight years from the scourge of terrorists who have slaughtered innocent people, caused a humanitarian crisis, destroyed our infrastructure, and plundered the country. History will forever remember the heroism of Syrians in their war against terrorism. Syrians defended not only themselves, their country, and their culture, but also humanity as whole, civilized values, and the culture of tolerance and coexistence. They defended those values against extremism and the ideology of hatred and death that terrorist groups, such as ISIL, Al-Nusra Front, and their sponsors and supporters, were trying to spread.

We are determined to continue our war against terrorism in all its forms until rooting out the last remaining terrorist. In addition, we will take every necessary measure to avoid its resurgence. However, putting an end to this global nightmare, which haunts everyone, requires a genuine international will. We will not be reinventing the wheel. We already have a multiple legal instruments of Security Council resolutions; some were adopted under chapter 7 that focus on fighting terrorism and drying up its funding and resources. The problem is that these resolutions remain dead letter. Unfortunately, countering terrorism has yet to become a priority for certain countries that remain deathly silent in the face of brutal terrorism facing countries like my own. While some countries merely issue empty statements, some actually invest in terrorism, using it as a tool to impose their insidious agendas on the people and governments that reject their external diktats and insist on making their own decisions. The case of Syria has been the clearest example of such foreign investment in terrorism. Tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters have been brought to Syria from more than a hundred countries, with the support and cover of states that are known to all. Even more, these same states deny us the right to defend our people against terrorists, which they consider “freedom fighters” or “Syrian armed opposition”, as some liked to call them. However, it has slipped their minds that if they continue with their approach, terrorism will reemerge stronger than ever before and will threaten everyone without exception, including its supporters and financiers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The most recent example is the situation in Idlib, Syria. It is known to all that Idlib currently hosts the largest gathering of foreign terrorist fighters in the world, according to the reports of specialized Security Council Committees themselves. The time I have been allotted today is not

enough to list all the crimes that these terrorists have committed. However, I must mention their continued rocket and mortar attacks against civilian areas close to Idlib and their use of civilians in Idlib as human shields, preventing those civilians from leaving through the Abou Dohour humanitarian corridor that the Syrian government opened. The question I; would one of your governments stand and watch if faced with a similar situation? Would you ever forfeit your right and duty to defend your people and liberate your country from terrorists and foreigners?

The Syrian government has engaged in the political initiatives aimed at solving the situation in Idlib, giving them more than enough time to be implemented. We have welcomed the memorandum creating the de-escalation zones and the Sochi Agreement on Idlib, hoping that such steps would complement efforts to eliminate Al-Nusra Front and ISIL remnants and other terrorist groups operating in Idlib, with the lowest possible loss of civilian lives. We have also announced more than once the suspension of military operations. Meanwhile, in the interim, the Turkish Regime has failed to fulfill its commitments under these agreements. Instead, it has provided terrorists with all forms of support, including weapons that are more sophisticated. Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Nusra Front has taken control of 90% of Idlib, and the Turkish observation points established inside Syria have been used to support these terrorists and block the advances of the Syrian army in its war against them. The Turkish Regime is now rushing, with the support of some Western countries, to protect Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups there just as they have done before. Can you imagine, Ladies and Gentlemen, that a country would directly intervene to protect the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Nusra Front, the same terrorist group that the Security Council Resolutions themselves consider a threat not only to Syria, but also to international peace and security!

Mr. President,

The United States and Turkey maintain an illegal military presence in Northern Syria. They have been so arrogant to the point of holding discussions and reaching agreements on the creation of a so-called 'safe zone' inside Syria, as if they were planning to establish this zone on American or Turkish soil! This is a violation of international law and the UN Charter. Any agreement about any part of Syria without the consent of the Syrian government is condemned and rejected in form and in substance. Any foreign forces operating in our territories without our authorization are

occupying forces and must withdraw immediately. If they refuse, we have the right to take any and all countermeasures authorized under international law.

In this regard, I would like to refer quickly to the terrorist, criminal, and oppressive practices implemented by the secessionist militias known as SDF against Syrians in the governorates of Hasaka, Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, and Aleppo. With the support of the United States and coalition forces, they seek to impose a new reality that serves American and Israeli agendas in the region and prolongs the war terrorists are waging against Syria.

Mr. President,

Turkey's policies, whether in Idlib or in Northern Syria and its political maneuvers may undermine all the achievements made in Astana. Turkey cannot claim to uphold Syria's unity and territorial integrity while at the same time being the first to undermine them. If Turkey is truly committed to the security of its borders and the unity of Syria, as it claims, it must choose whether to respect the Astana understandings and the bilateral agreements on counter-terrorism to secure the borders and to withdraw its forces from Syria, or to be the aggressor and the occupier - and to face the consequences. The safety of the borders of one country cannot come at the expense of the security, sovereignty, or territorial integrity of neighboring countries.

Mr. President,

Along with our fight against terrorism, we have been committed to moving the political process forward. We are participating in the Astana meetings, which are proving effective, and we welcomed the outcomes of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, including the convening of a committee to discuss the constitution. To that end, we have engaged seriously and constructively with the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Syria to form this committee. Indeed, it was the determination of Syria to form the Constitutional Committee, under the persistence pursuance of each minute detail by President Bashar al-Assad, which led to achieve this important national development for the Syrian People, and to thwarted all attempts of obstructions by some parties that have consistently stalled and continue to stall, placing their bets on terrorists and foreign forces and imposing preconditions to prevent any return to normalcy in Syria.

During his last visit to Damascus, we reached an agreement with the Special Envoy Mr. Gier Pedersen on the terms of reference and rules of procedure of this Committee, including a number of principles related to the work of the committee. These include:

1- The whole process should be owned and led by Syrians themselves who have the exclusive right of determining their country's future without any foreign interference.

2- There must be no prejudice whatsoever to the strong commitment of upholding fully the sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

3- No preconditions must be imposed on the committee, nor should its recommendations be prejudged. The committee must be independent. Its recommendations must be made independently, without interference from any country or party, such as the so-called 'small group' that has declared itself the guardian of the Syrian people and has already prejudged the outcome of the committee's work.

4- No deadlines or timetables must be imposed on the committee. Each step taken must be prudent and informed, since the constitution is the essential step in the determination of Syria's future. Although we remain committed to making progress, such progress must be on firm footing to meet the aspirations of Syrians.

5- The Special Envoy for Syria must play the role of a facilitator, using his good offices as necessary to bridge differences.

With these principles in mind, we reaffirm our readiness to engage and work actively with friendly countries and the Special Envoy to launch the work of this Committee.

Mr. President,

Simultaneously, Syria is making tremendous efforts to improve the humanitarian situation on the ground and rebuild what the terrorists destroyed. Significant progress has been made despite the illegal and inhumane economic blockade that some countries have imposed on our people. The blockade has restricted access to medical equipment, medicine, oil products necessary for electricity, household gas, and heating fuel. The United States has even threatened companies

participating in the Damascus International Fair in order to stifle any economic activity in Syria. Failing to achieve their goals through armed terrorism, these countries have resorted to economic terrorism, an equally brutal form of terrorism, imposing a blockade and unilateral coercive economic measures.

Therefore, we call on all peace-loving countries that uphold international law to come together and adopt effective measures to counter this phenomenon, which is not only used against Syria but has become a weapon of political and economic blackmail against many other countries. We call once again for the lifting of such illegal measures imposed on Syrians and on all other independent people, in particular the people of Iran, Venezuela, the DPRK, Cuba, and Belarus, and we stand with China and Russia in the face of the unjust American policies.

We have made it clear that the doors are open for the voluntary and safe return of all Syrian refugees to their homeland. To that end, the Syrian Government is providing the necessary facilities, rebuilding and rehabilitating the public infrastructure in areas liberated from terrorists. However, Western and some countries of destination for refugees continue to obstruct such initiatives. Indeed, we have noticed a strange change in the position of these countries. Instead of using every opportunity to call for the immediate return of refugees to Syria, as they had always done, these countries are now imposing artificial conditions to prevent such returns, using this purely humanitarian issue as leverage to serve their political agendas. This is truly reminiscent of the theater of the absurd. What is happening, however, is no laughing matter; It is a manipulation of the fate of nations and a cheap exploitation of their suffering.

Mr. President,

Instead of working towards peace and stability in the region, Israel has started yet another phase of escalation, heightening regional tensions to unprecedented levels. Israel did not only occupy Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan. It continues to violate international humanitarian and human rights laws and to support terrorism on a daily basis. It has even launched repeated attacks on Syrian territories and on the territories of neighboring countries under false pretexts, in flagrant violation of international law, the UN Charter, and relevant Security Council Resolutions. These Israeli violations would not continue and escalate if it were not for the blind support of certain countries that are fully responsible for the consequences of Israel's actions. Such

support became horrifically evident when the United States decided to recognize Israel's alleged and false sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan, recognize the occupied city of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem, not to mention the intensive US efforts to undermine the Palestinian cause. All of these decisions are null and void and represent a complete disregard of international legitimacy.

Some must understand that the era of the acquisition of land by force has long passed. It is a delusion to think that the crisis in Syria would force us to forfeit our inalienable right to recover the Golan fully to the borders of June 4, 1967, by using all possible means under international law. Moreover, it is a delusion to think that the decisions of the US administration on the sovereignty over the Golan would alter historical and geographical facts or the provisions of international law. The Golan has been and will forever be part of Syria. Israel must be compelled to implement relevant United Nations Resolutions, notably Resolution 497 on the occupied Syrian Golan, and to cease its repeated attacks on the countries of the region as well as its settlement activities. Israel must be compelled to allow the Palestinian people to establish its own independent state with Jerusalem as its capital along the borders of June 4, 1967, and ensure the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes.

Mr. President,

Syria expresses once again its full solidarity with the Islamic Republic of Iran in the face of the irresponsible American measures, in particular the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between Iran, the P5+one and the EU. We warn against policies that aim to foment crises and conflicts in the Gulf under false pretexts. We believe that the security and stability of the Gulf can only be achieved through cooperation and dialogue among the countries of that region, without any external interference that might increase escalation in the region and run counter to the interests of the people of the Gulf.

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I confirm that Syria, supported by its allies and friends, has stood firm in the face of externally supported organized terrorism that targeted Syria, its people, and its culture. Today, we are ushering in a new era that will bring us closer to our final victory. We aspire to a bright and safe future for our people after the long-suffering. We are conscious that the various challenges and difficulties that we are facing today or will face in the future are as intractable as the phenomenon of terrorism. However, we are determined to overcome them just the same. We have always had the best relations with other countries. We have never sought to antagonize anyone. Today, our hands are extended for peace. We continue to promote dialogue and mutual understanding, while staying true to our national principles, which we will never betray. Obviously, there are governments that have offended Syria and its people. Nevertheless, we will never hold a grudge or seek revenge. We will engage with others, keeping in mind the interests of our country and our people, in line with our desire to achieve peace, stability, and prosperity in Syria and the region. In exchange, those countries that have antagonized Syria must reconsider their positions and correct any miscalculations. They must let go of their delusions and resort to realism and commonsense for the common good.

Thank you for your attention.