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D3. State Department, Briefing in the Wake of UNESCO's Approval of Full Palestinian Membership, Washington, 3 November 2011 (excerpts).

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assembly approving by a wide margin the Palestinian request for full membership in the organization (as opposed to observer status) was the starting point for the Palestine-related segment of the State Department's daily press briefing. Spokesperson Victoria Nuland was hammered on the U.S. defunding of UNESCO and progress on the peace process. The transcript was distributed by the State Department and is available on its website at www.state.gov.

QUESTION: Okay. So presumably, you all have seen Prime Minister Netanyahu's reaction to the Palestinian move at UNESCO in terms of accelerating settlements and at least temporarily cutting off the transfer of the tax money that they provide to the—collect for and then are supposed to send on to the Palestinians. What is your—well, what are your thoughts about that?

MS. NULAND: Well, our view on these kinds of things has not changed. We don't consider it helpful. We don't consider that it contributes to the environment that we need to move forward. But more generally, I think it's probably a good moment to . . . remind ourselves what the logic of the proposal that the Quartet put forward on September 23rd was.

It was that rather than engaging in provocative action vis-à-vis each other, these parties would, under the auspices of the Quartet and with the Quartet's help, start working on narrowing the differences that divide them on the essential issues, particularly issues of security, issues of land, territory, et cetera. So that's what we want to do. We want to get the focus back to the Quartet process, back to narrowing the differences rather than either side conducting actions that hurt the environment for negotiations.

. . .

QUESTION: (Inaudible), you said that we're trying every minute, every hour of every day to try to get the sides back into talks. When was the last time that Secretary Clinton made a phone call either to a senior Israeli or a senior Palestinian official on the peace process?

D3. STATE DEPARTMENT, BRIEFING IN THE WAKE OF UNESCO'S APPROVAL OF FULL PALESTINIAN MEMBERSHIP, WASHINGTON, 3 NOVEMBER 2011 (EXCERPTS).

The 31 October vote of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) general

MS. NULAND: Well, we had extensive contacts, as you know, in the New York timeframe, face-to-face contacts both at the presidential level, at the secretarial level. We've had the envoy meeting since then . . .

QUESTION: I mean, that was—the New York timeframe was six weeks ago, right? And there is a very widely held perception among certainly the community of analysts that look at this that the Administration isn't just doing all that much. . . . We can ask at the White House for when the President last actually talked to somebody, but has the Secretary not actually spoken to an Israeli or a Palestinian for six weeks now?

MS. NULAND: I can't speak to whether she's not spoken to a single member because, for example, there may have been international meetings. But the Secretary takes action when our negotiators judge that a conversation between her and an Israeli leader or a Palestinian leader can help push the balance and affect the outcome. I don't think anybody doubts, nor should anybody doubt, her commitment, the President's commitment to the process that the President set in motion with his speech on May 19th, setting out the clearest framework for how we could move forward, her support for the Quartet process, her personal engagement in New York.

We are still at the stage of working at the envoy level to try to get concrete proposals together. So we need to see each side, Israelis and Palestinians, put their ideas down on paper. And she will interject and intervene and support that process as necessary as we go forward.

QUESTION: Is the absence of calls on her part, then, a tacit admission of American impotence here?

MS. NULAND: Arshad, we are leading a Quartet process that is engaged in trying to find a path forward, despite the obstacles, despite the obstacles in the UN system, despite the obstacles on the ground. And we are not the ones who are giving up here on trying to get these parties back to the table.

. . .

QUESTION: . . . Do you regard the Israeli response, which is to—I mean,

as this is publicly known—to accelerate settlement building, which, of course, the Palestinians reject, and to, at least temporarily, cut off funding for the Palestinians, do you regard this as not merely not helpful but indeed actually counterproductive? Because, particularly in the case of the funding—I mean, in the case of the settlement building, it's hard to see how that makes the Palestinians any more inclined to do what you want them to do, which is to come back to the negotiating table and put their ideas down on paper. And in the case of the funding freeze, however long it lasts, that essentially starves the Palestinian Authority, which does work, which the Israeli Government and an Israeli general, who you cited recently, view as actually useful in terms of preserving security. So is this not merely not helpful, but—or—but actually counterproductive to what you perceive to be your interests and Israel's interests?

MS. NULAND: Look, we are deeply disappointed by yesterday's announcement about the accelerated housing construction in Jerusalem and in the West Bank. We continue to make our opposition to this clear to the Government of Israel. And as we've said again and again and again, unilateral actions by either party work against efforts to resume direct negotiations and do not advance the goal of a reasonable and necessary agreement between these parties.

So we've also said that we believe that the regular transfer of money, whether it's U.S. money, whether it's Israeli money, is important and should continue to be made. These are key to strengthening Palestinian institutions and are necessary for funding future of the state. So again, we want to see both sides get back to focusing on the negotiations and away from unilateral actions that make all of that harder.

QUESTION: At what level have you made clear your continued opposition to these steps? Was it the ambassador in Tel Aviv? Was it—

MS. NULAND: Certainly the ambassador in Tel Aviv. I believe that David Hale's also been on the phone today.

QUESTION: Anybody higher than that? The assistant secretary or the—

MS. NULAND: Well, David Hale is the Secretary's representative on these issues.

...

QUESTION: One quick—you said the Israeli money, but that's actually Palestinian money, as I understand it. These are taxes.

MS. NULAND: Correct. Correct.

QUESTION: Okay. And do you see an equivalent, then, of what the Palestinians did, having this very symbolic vote at UNESCO versus these tangible response that the Israelis are doing, withholding Palestinian money and building more settlements?

MS. NULAND: I think our concern is that neither of these sets of actions is helpful to the environment of getting back to the negotiating table. And obviously, there's an action/reaction here that is not helpful. So we're trying to get these parties into a positive cycle of engagement and trying to encourage them to come back to the table, and that's going to continue to be our focus. And our concern is that the move in UNESCO, whereas it may have looked symbolic to some, actually has real consequences—has consequences on the U.S. side, which you've already seen, but it also has consequences in terms of the environment, that this is what we've been warning about.

QUESTION: But, Toria, you've been saying all along that it doesn't change anything; the UNESCO movement doesn't change anything on the ground at all. And in fact, it doesn't, does it? But what Israel did yesterday does change things on the ground.

MS. NULAND: It changes the—

QUESTION: And yet you're still—you're unprepared or unwilling, politically or for other—to take any action against either side for continuing to do things that you say are destructive to the peace process.

MS. NULAND: What are you proposing, Matt?

...

QUESTION: . . . It's not my job to propose things. That would be the best and the brightest that you allegedly

have working in this Administration trying to figure things out. I am asking how U.S. policy—how is it U.S. policy to encourage peace talks if you're unwilling to do anything against either side when they continue to ignore you and, in fact, not just to ignore you but to make matters worse, is what you said. . . . You punish them. You take some kind of action. You have, or you did have, leverage with the Israelis because you gave them \$3 billion a year. You do have, or did have, leverage with the Palestinians because you give them millions of dollars a year. And yet, you're not going to do anything with that?

MS. NULAND: Again, I think we're engaged in a policy polemic here rather than questions for the podium.

...

QUESTION: Answer this: Is the Administration upset or embarrassed at all by the fact that two relatively tiny groups of people are running roughshod over American foreign policy?

MS. NULAND: We are concerned about whether we can get back to a good environment for talks. That is what we are concerned about.

QUESTION: You do believe that your involvement in UN organizations such as UNESCO, such as the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency], such as the World Health Organization, are in—that your involvement is—that that's an American national security interest or in an American interest. And you're prepared to allow these two small groups of people to make you forfeit your national interests in international organizations. That's what you're saying to me.

MS. NULAND: Look, with regard to UNESCO, we were absolutely clear, not only with the Palestinians but with the international community before this happened, that if this went forward, there would be a cost. There is legislation on the books. It is U.S. law that we have to cut off funding in this case. That is what we have done. The choice was clear. The choice was made. But now what's important is that everybody—the parties, the international community—all need to take a step back and find a way forward back to the

negotiating table that doesn't force bad choices on the international community, that enables the parties to get back to productive work together. That is what we are focused on . . .

QUESTION: Across the street this morning, Secretary—former Secretary of State James Baker complained that the U.S. is actually showing no leadership. And he referenced his position back 20 years ago on the loan guarantees, when he said that we will give the loan guarantees if you stop the settlements. And he apparently used that as basis of an example of leadership. Do you concur with Secretary Baker?

MS. NULAND: Well, Secretary Baker is a private citizen. He was engaged in this process 20 years ago. He also spent a lot of his time as Secretary working on these issues. I would note that at the time when Secretary Baker was serving, the U.S. was not speaking out publicly about the importance of the Palestinians having a state.

QUESTION: Okay, just a quick follow up. He also mentioned a number of things. He said that for the next 12 months, there is not likely to be any kind of serious negotiations—going back to negotiations—and therefore, the United States should focus on three things: one, to maintain peace in Gaza; and second, to make sure that Israeli-Palestinian security arrangements remain and, in fact, aid to the security apparatus, the Palestinian security, continues; and thirdly, and most importantly, to really focus on the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, that if that goes down, then everything else in the region will go down.

MS. NULAND: Well I think we're certainly focused on all of those things, but we are also focused on trying to make progress with these parties and trying to use the President's framework from May 19th and the Quartet framework to get these parties really working on the issues that divide them and narrowing the differences. We are not prepared to give up on narrowing the differences between these parties . . .

QUESTION: I just want to follow up on this. And lastly, do you feel that at one point if Israel continues to issue these permits for a new settlement and

so on, that at one point this window will close completely?

MS. NULAND: Said, I'm not going to set up false premises out there in the future. You know where we're focused . . .

QUESTION: Secretary of—former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also gave a very strong interview to Associated Press yesterday in which she also had serious issues with the way that this Administration was handling the peace process. Now in the last two days, you have . . . two former Secretary of States questioning the way this Administration is handling the peace process. You haven't been able to get the parties to the table. It does, to Matt's point and Arshad's point, speak to an ineffectiveness, if not—no one's challenging your commitment to wanting a two-state solution, but it does speak to the ineffectiveness of U.S. policy.

Is there any thought to maybe including a wider group in some kind of these peace efforts? I'm not talking about the Quartet per se, but other parties that have influence on the parties. I mean, you don't—just to be blunt, I mean, you just don't seem to be getting anywhere with these parties. You don't seem to have enough influence if you're not willing to take these measures of consequence to get the parties to do what you need them to do. So do you either go back to the drawing board and start again or do you walk away and say if you're not going to help yourselves, we can't help you?

MS. NULAND: Well, first of all, I don't think that anybody here believes you can bludgeon parties to the peace table. That is not the exercise that we're engaged in. Second, I would reject the premise that we haven't moved forward in recent weeks. We did have, less than two weeks ago, the envoy meetings with each party in which both parties agreed to try to work now with us on the next stage of the roadmap that the Quartet put forward, namely to come up with concrete proposals on territory, on security.

So we're going to continue to keep our sleeves rolled up and work with these parties on that with the goal of having another meeting in the next couple of weeks where we can see what

the progress of their internal thinking is, and to try to meet the deadline of having them exchange those first drafts with each other within 90 days. So we've got a path going forward and we are focused on trying to stick to that so that we can actually narrow the gap, because that's what's most important.

QUESTION: But that path, respectfully, can't be done, don't you think, in a vacuum to what's going on on the ground right now and the unilateral moves that both sides are taking.

MS. NULAND: That's exactly why we were warning against the move in UNESCO, exactly why we have been critical of the settlement activity, and why we want to focus international pressure on these parties to come back, why we've set out a concrete step-by-step approach that breaks things down into smaller bites and endeavors to narrow the gap . . .

QUESTION: Just a quick—can I follow up on that? You said another meeting in the next couple of weeks. Did you mean another set of meetings—

MS. NULAND: Correct.

QUESTION: —meaning separate meetings with each side?

MS. NULAND: Correct. Another set of meetings.

. . .

QUESTION: (Inaudible) last two questions, Said's point that next 12 months might not be negotiations, which you did not object to that. . . . And second is your appearing as ineffective in the Middle East peace process. Some argue that these two reasons because of the next 12 months is the reelection season and they have the Administration's in U.S. in need with the strong Israel lobbies. Do you see this reelection term in any way making you less effective in any way it affects your ability?

. . .

MS. NULAND: No. We are focused on trying to make as much progress as we can. As I said, we are working on having another round, another session, with these parties in coming weeks. We are focused very much on the 90-day clock that the Quartet set forward for

these parties to be ready to exchange their ideas with each other so that we can start negotiations.

QUESTION: According to news reports from Israeli press, Prime Minister Netanyahu has been trying to commit his cabinet to bomb Iran in near term. First of all, do you—how do you assess this kind of a statement? And secondly, how do you see this threat of the Iranian nuclear weapons in near term? Is there anything changing radical—in radical terms?

MS. NULAND: Well, first of all, I'm not going to comment on stray press reports out of Israel. I'm going to send you to the Israeli Government for its views on these things. We remain committed to Israel's security. We and Israel share a deep concern about the direction that Iran is taking. We continue to work with Israel, with the international community, to speak clearly with regard to Iran's nuclear obligations. And you know where we are on this, that Iran has got to make—take the necessary steps established by the international community to come back into compliance with its obligations.

QUESTION: Well, without speaking to it, the—there has been previous concern by the—about the possibility for Israel to take unilateral action against Iran. So this report aside—this news report aside, what is level of concern here in this Administration that Israel might take unilateral action?

MS. NULAND: Well, we are focused with Israel, we are focused with our other international partners, on getting Iran to comply with the IAEA, to increase the international pressure for Iran to comply, and that's the focus of our activity.

QUESTION: Did you just, in response to the second-to-last question, say that there was no—that the U.S. election season has no influence over how you approach the peace process?

MS. NULAND: I don't think that's exactly the way the question came, Matt.

. . .

QUESTION: Let me ask the question straightly—straight, then. I believe that the question was there is concern that political pressure in the United States during the election season may make it

difficult for the U.S. to be a completely honest broker in the peace talks. Do you reject that accusation? Do you reject the suggestion that the American political process, i.e., the upcoming presidential election, will have any role in what America does, what the Administration does, as it relates to the peace process?

MS. NULAND: I reject the notion that we are working any less hard now than we have been working over the last few months and years on trying to get these parties back to the table.

QUESTION: Okay. Good. Because I thought what you said was no, flat out no, the American election season doesn't have any influence on—

MS. NULAND: I'm not here to comment on electoral issues or political issues.