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Rice's Middle East Agenda

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U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has embarked on a mission to the Middle East to reinforce the U.S. position on the recent surge of violence. Secretary Rice was right to announce that pressing for a ceasefire is not necessarily the best way to further the cause of peace—particularly if it rewards Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran, which have done much to instigate the current conflict. Rice should make the case that the United States remains anxious to promote solutions that will bring stability and security to all nations in the region. She must be clear to all sides that there are three unchanging messages from Washington.

Terrorism is Intolerable

Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran have repeatedly demonstrated that they consider terrorism to be a legitimate instrument of foreign policy. Hezbollah believes that attacking Israel will raise its prestige in the region and expand its control over the countryside. Syria hopes that the chaos will allow it reassert its control of Lebanon. Iran promotes the fighting to divert attention from efforts to end its nuclear ambitions. These are contemptible actions. The United States rejects the proposition that the intentional slaughter of innocents is an acceptable way to promote any agenda. Secretary Rice must dissuade the terrorists and their state sponsors from the notion that they can benefit by terrorist tactics and press others do the same.

Moderation Matters

The Arab world is hardly unified in its support for the Shiite-dominated Hezbollah. Many Sunnis fear that the group and its sponsorship by radical Shiite mullahs in Tehran are as much of a threat to them as to Israel. Even terrorist weblogs are debating whether an emboldened Hezbollah is a blessing or curse. The United States must reaffirm its support for moderate Arabs who recognize that the only real chance to achieve the blessings of honor and justice is to reject groups like Hezbollah that would slaughter or enslave one people to promote another.

Freedom Always Finds a Way

Hezbollah is at war—with the people of Lebanon. After decades of violence, civil war, and occupation, the people of Lebanon enjoyed a brief false dawn with the withdrawal of occupying armies and free elections. People could once again sip coffee at Beirut cafés without taking their lives in their hands. Hezbollah ended all of that for sake of aggrandizing its own position. It plunged the country back into conflict, conclusively demonstrating that it is the single greatest threat to the peace and

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security of the country. Secretary Rice must reaffirm America's commitment to stand by the people of Lebanon who voted for freedom with humanitarian assistance, reconstruction aid, support for good governance, and a pledge to press for the demilitarization of Hezbollah.

America's Message

Demonstrating American resolve and perseverance is the best contribution Secretary Rice can make to achieve a just outcome to the present conflict. Her task is to ensure that all parties hear and understand this message.

When ceasefire comes, the United States must make sure that it comports with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559, which calls for the disarming Hezbollah. In addition, the United States must not let the Security Council lose sight of its obligation to deal with the real troublemaker in the region—the offensive regime in Tehran.

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