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New York

Provisional

President: Mr. De Rivière. (France)

Members:

Algeria.	Mr. Bendjama
China.	Mr. Zhang Jun
Ecuador.	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
Guyana.	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
Japan.	Mr. Yamazaki
Malta.	Mrs. Frazier
Mozambique.	Mr. Fernandes
Republic of Korea.	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation.	Mr. Nebenzia
Sierra Leone.	Mr. Kanu
Slovenia.	Mr. Žbogar
Switzerland.	Mr. Hauri
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America.	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

Maintenance of international peace and security

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The meeting was called to order at 5.35 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of international peace and security

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Khiari.

Mr. Khiari: On 11 January, the military forces of the United States and the United Kingdom, supported by four countries, reportedly conducted over 50 air strikes and missile strikes on targets across Yemen, including in Sana'a, Taiz, Al-Hudaydah, Hajjah, Saada, Dhamar and Ibb. According to the Houthis, that resulted in five dead and six wounded fighters. The United Nations cannot independently verify those figures at this time. As of this afternoon, no United Nations staff or premises were reported as having been affected.

Yesterday's strikes follow the continued Houthi targeting of vessels in the Red Sea, including what was reported as "the largest attack to date" on 9 January, which involved a combination of drones and missiles that were intercepted by the United States and the United Kingdom naval forces. Subsequent to the adoption of resolution 2722 (2024), on 10 January, the Houthis reportedly launched another attack using an anti-ship ballistic missile on 11 January. The former attack was claimed by the Houthis to be a "preliminary retaliation" for the killing of Houthi fighters by United States naval forces in an incident reported on 31 December.

We are witnessing a cycle of violence that risks grave political, security, economic and humanitarian repercussions in Yemen and the region. Recent humanitarian improvements in the country are fragile and could easily be reversed if there are further incidents, while progress on reaching a political settlement to end the war in Yemen could also be undermined, leaving the people of Yemen to face the impact of continued conflict.

These developments in the Red Sea and the risk of exacerbating regional tensions are alarming. The Houthis's attack following the adoption of the Security Council resolution and yesterday's events further demonstrate that the region is on a dangerous escalatory trajectory that could potentially impact millions in Yemen, the region and globally.

In a statement issued today, the Secretary General called upon all parties involved not to escalate the situation even more, in the interest of peace and stability in the Red Sea and the wider region. All the parties concerned must do their utmost to avoid further escalation, reduce tensions and exercise restraint.

We also reaffirm the importance of ensuring the safety and security of maritime navigation in the region, as emphasized in resolution 2722 (2024). In that regard, we also call for the immediate release of the *MV Galaxy Leader*, which was seized by the Houthis on 19 November, and the release of its crew.

We call on the Council to continue its efforts in actively engaging with all the parties concerned to prevent further escalation from exacerbating regional tensions or undermining regional peace, security or international trade.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Khaled Khiari for his briefing. To be honest, given the blatant armed aggression against a sovereign country, we would have liked to have seen the Secretary-General as a briefer today.

The main task of the United Nations, as enshrined in its Charter, is to prevent threats to peace and to suppress acts of aggression or other violations of peace in accordance with the principles of international law. With great regret, we note that yesterday we encountered just such a situation — armed aggression by a group of countries against another State. On 11 January, the so-called "international coalition", headed by the United States and Great Britain and comprising Australia, Canada, Bahrain and the Netherlands — who calls itself the capital of global justice — launched a massive strike on the territory of Yemen. I am not talking about an attack on some group within the country, but an attack on the people of the country as a whole. Aircraft,

warships and submarines were involved. There are reports that United States Navy craft launched Tomahawk missiles as well. The strikes hit the Yemeni port of Al-Hudaydah, the cities of Sana'a, Saada, Zabid, Taiz and Dhamar. Americans and their satellites bombarded airports and other infrastructure. At the site of the craters, explosions gave rise to fires.

Unfortunately, what we are seeing in Yemen is painfully familiar. The same picture of destruction has already been unfolding for three months in the Gaza Strip. Right now, long-suffering Yemen has once again become a hotbed of hostilities in the region. The war is spreading to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Clearly, Washington is not going to stop there. The White House has said that it reserves the right to resume military action if it sees further threats. It does not take an expert to see that the United States will determine those "threats" and its response measures at its own discretion, without the slightest regard for international law.

Contrary to what our Western colleagues are saying, the mass strikes by the United States and the United Kingdom against the territory of Yemen have nothing to do with the right to self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. Article 51 does not apply to the situation of commercial vessels. The right to self-defence cannot be invoked to ensure the freedom of navigation, and our American colleagues are well aware of that. Besides, there was no authorization by the Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter to use force.

The situation is crystal clear. The actions of the so-called coalition are in blatant breach of Article 2 of the Charter. It is another act of military aggression by the collective West to add to the long list of its "raids" against the long-suffering Middle East. All of the White House's pseudo-legal justifications do not stand up to any criticism. May I remind members that the "freedom of navigation" is regulated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982. In the event of a violation, the Convention makes it possible to negotiate with the violator and to file a request for arbitration or to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. Nothing in that document, or in customary international maritime law, gives anyone the right to attack a sovereign country. It is also striking that, while trying to find some kind of justification for its illegitimate actions, Washington has been inconsistent its evidence. It suffices to mention the reference to

piracy — absolutely ridiculous in legal terms — in the statement by the President of the United States. It is clear to anyone who has seen the definition of piracy in Article 101 of the Convention at least once. But even if we were talking about pirates, the Convention gives the right to detain a pirate vessel and bring the crew to trial rather than bomb yet another country back into the Stone Age.

Russia has repeatedly warned against the risks of such developments. We have consistently called for a ceasefire in Gaza, including in order to prevent further regional escalation and the involvement of neighbouring countries, albeit indirectly, in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict against the background of Israel's unprecedentedly brutal military operation in the enclave. But all attempts by the Security Council to take a decision demanding an end to the violence have been blocked by the United States. Time and again, instead of addressing the root causes of instability with a focus on political solutions, the West prefers to use force. Instead of making Israel cease fire in Gaza, the West provides it with opportunities to continue exterminating Palestinian women and children.

During the voting on resolution 2722 (2024), on the so-called safety of navigation in the Red Sea, co-sponsored by Japan and the United States, we warned that we could not trust the assurances of Western delegations about their allegedly good intentions. From the outset, they intended to give a perverse interpretation of the vague language of that incoherent document in order to try to give to their criminal actions a veneer of legality. Knowing about the risks of such a scenario, we proposed amendments to balance the text so that we could avoid this scenario. Unfortunately, the majority of Council members did not find the resolve to support our proposal. But even in its current form, resolution 2722 (2024) makes no reference to Chapter VII of the Charter and does not authorize in any way the outrageous arbitrary acts that the United States and its satellites are perpetrating in Yemen, which could lead to a full-fledged war not only in that country but also across the region.

The United States and its allies have a long track record of gross violations and misinterpretations of international law. In an attempt to cover up their aggression against Syria with a fig leaf. Back in the day, the Americans invented an absurd concept that supposedly allowed collective self-defence with a non-State entity — the Syrian Kurds — against the

Syrian army, on Syrian territory. Naturally, that concept had nothing to do with international law or the Charter of the United Nations. Under international law, the actions of the United States against Syria were — and remain — a use of force in violation of the Charter — that is, military aggression and an occupation. In a similar manner and through a gross misinterpretation of the provisions of the relevant Council resolutions, the NATO coalition destroyed Libyan statehood in 2011.

Recently, the French have distinguished themselves by cynically calling the right to self-defence an obvious war crime by the Kyiv junta — a strike with cluster bombs on a children's skating rink and a Christmas fair in Belgorod. There were no military facilities nearby, and the time and place of the strike, as well as the cluster munition itself, had been picked deliberately to increase the number of civilian casualties, including women and children. The United States and its sycophants also consistently call the slaughter that Israel continues to carry out in Gaza self-defence. Although the International Court of Justice, in its 2004 advisory opinion (see A/ES-10/273), explicitly excluded Israel's ability to invoke Article 51 in relation to its actions in the occupied Palestinian territories, taking into account the peculiarities of the status of those territories. Apparently, when it comes to Washington's hegemonic aspirations, neither international law nor the International Court of Justice carry any weight for Americans and their allies. That is what the "rules-based world order" promoted by the United States and other Western countries is about.

The situation in the Middle East is becoming critical. I am not even talking about the fact that, by its actions, the West is ruining the results of years of efforts by the United Nations and regional mediators to settle the Yemeni conflict. The problem is much broader. Such reckless and short-sighted steps destabilize the security situation and undermine the emerging normalization in the region. If the escalation continues, the entire Middle East could face a catastrophe that would outmatch everything that has happened so far. The lives lost and destinies destroyed will be incalculable. The entire responsibility for this will lie with the United States and its accomplices, who, for the sake of their vested geopolitical interests, not only persistently prevent the international community from demanding a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, but have once again become the aggressors themselves. We call on the international community to resolutely condemn the attack on Yemen

by a group of countries led by the United States, which was carried out without a United Nations mandate. We share the concerns expressed by our regional partners in that regard and call for intensified international efforts to prevent further escalation of violence in the Middle East.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

The United Kingdom and the Security Council have consistently condemned in the strongest terms the illegal and unjustified attacks in the Red Sea by the Houthi militants. On 9 January, the Houthis attacked British and American naval vessels. Last night, we took limited, necessary and proportionate action in self-defence — alongside the United States and with the non-operational support of the Netherlands, Canada, Bahrain and Australia. The United Kingdom Royal Air Force carried out targeted strikes against military facilities used by Houthi rebels in Yemen. The operation took particular care to minimize risks to civilians.

Since November, the Houthis have launched than 100 drone and missile attacks against vessels from a range of countries, putting innocent lives at risk, threatening the global economy and destabilizing the region. This has continued despite the Council's demand in resolution 2722 (2024), adopted earlier this week, that the Houthis immediately cease all such attacks.

Let me be clear: the attacks by the Houthis on vessels in the Red Sea must stop. We have made that clear to the Houthis, and we call on them to de-escalate. The United Kingdom is committed to continue working with the international community and the Council to combat that international threat. We have published a summary of our legal position on last night's strikes and have reported to the Council in writing in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations.

We remain committed to ensuring the freedom of navigation, which is protected by international law, and to defending international trade. It is in all our interests to work together to de-escalate tensions in the region.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

As members have heard, last night, in response to ongoing and escalating Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, the United States and the United Kingdom, with support

from Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands, conducted a number of joint strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen. The aim of those strikes was to disrupt and degrade the Houthis's ability to continue their reckless attacks against vessels and commercial shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The strikes were necessary and proportionate, as we just heard from my British colleague. They were consistent with international law and in exercise of the United States' inherent right to self-defence, as reflected in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. They were taken only after non-military options proved inadequate to address the threat.

Still, any strike of that nature is a decision that the United States does not take lightly. I would therefore like to walk us through how we reached this moment and to discuss the steps that we all must take going forward to de-escalate the situation while upholding navigational rights and freedoms, because while that coordinated response follows the Houthis's largest, most complex and most recent attacks earlier this week, the fact is that the Houthis's opportunistic attacks on vessels have been escalating since November 2023.

No one in this Chamber is immune from the effects of those attacks — not even Russia. Whether a ship flies an American flag or that of another nation, and whether members voted in favour of the resolution adopted earlier this week (resolution 2722 (2023)) or abstained in the voting, so long as any one of our ships is vulnerable, all of our ships are vulnerable.

Since November 2023, 2,000 ships have been forced to divert thousands of miles to avoid the Red Sea. More than 50 nations have been affected by 27 Houthi attacks on international commercial shipping. Houthi militants have threatened or taken hostage mariners from more than 20 countries, including the crew of the *MV Galaxy Leader*, a Bahamas-flagged and Japanese-operated vessel. On 19 November 2023, Houthi forces hijacked the ship and kidnapped a multinational crew, including Bulgarian, Mexican, Romanian, Ukrainian and Filipino citizens. Despite the Council's calls for the release of the ship and its crew, the Houthis still hold them hostage to this day. Not long after, following the Council's condemnation of those attacks, a Norwegian-flagged vessel was struck by what appeared to be an anti-ship missile launched from a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen. Days later, Houthi forces attempted to board a Marshall Islands-flagged vessel, while a pair

of missiles were once again launched from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

Therefore, on 18 December 2023, the United States established Operation Prosperity Guardian: a 22-country-strong defensive coalition to help to defend against Houthi threats in the Red Sea. On 19 December 2023, one month after the Houthis first took the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew hostage, 44 countries condemned Houthi interference with navigational rights and freedoms in the Red Sea. Unfortunately, the Houthis continued their attacks.

On 26 December 2023, United States forces intercepted 12 one-way attack drones, three anti-ship cruise missiles and two land-attack cruise missiles in the southern Red Sea, all fired by the Houthis at multiple vessels crossing the waterway. Aiming to deter further attacks and de-escalate the situation, the United States put forward a presidential statement that received strong support — save, unfortunately, from one member of the Council.

As we deliberated further on 30 and 31 December 2023, the attacks escalated, when Houthis targeted and then attempted to commandeer a Singapore-flagged and Denmark-owned and -operated ship. When the Houthi attackers ignored warnings and fired on our naval helicopters, the United States responded by striking and sinking three of their four boats.

While the United States sought to defend commercial ships in the Red Sea, we also continued to pursue a diplomatic response. On 3 January, the United States — along with 13 other countries, representing some of the world's largest shippers — warned that the Houthis's attacks threaten innocent lives, the global economy and the free flow of commerce, noting that the Houthis would bear the full consequences should they continue those attacks.

That same day, the Council convened an emergency meeting (see S/PV.9525) where there was a consensus for Council action. Therefore, in partnership with Japan, we penned the resolution that was adopted earlier this week (resolution 2722 (2024)) following extensive consultations. The resolution once again called for the Houthis to cease their attacks and condemned those who provided the arms and assistance needed to carry them out. I would also note that the resolution referenced the inherent right of Member States to defend, in accordance with international law, their vessels from attacks.

Why, then, take members through this timeline? Because doing so makes it exceedingly clear: yesterday's strike was the latest in a series of actions in self-defence taken by the United States alongside other countries, and which occurred against a broad diplomatic backdrop of global condemnation.

The United States does not desire more conflict in a region already plagued by so much of it. Our aim is simple: to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea, while upholding the fundamental principles of the freedom of navigation. In order to do that, the Council must continue to do a few things.

We must continue to make clear that, despite bad-faith claims to the contrary, most of the vessels that the Houthis have attacked have nothing to do with Israel. It goes without saying that attacks on any vessel in the Red Sea, regardless of its origin or ownership, are entirely unacceptable. Arguing otherwise risks legitimizing clear violations of international law.

We also need to be clear about the role of Iran in the attacks. Without Iranian support, in violation of its obligations under resolution 2216 (2015), the Houthis would struggle to effectively track and strike commercial vessels navigating shipping lanes through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Every member of the Council, and especially those with direct channels to Iran, should press Iran's leaders to rein in the Houthis and stop the attacks.

Finally, the Council itself must continue to demand that the Houthis cease their attacks and release the mariners and ship that they continue to hold hostage. We must continue to uphold the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways in accordance with international law. That was the charge before us when we first spoke out on this issue in December. It was the charge before us when we convened earlier this week (see S/PV. 9527), and that is the urgent charge before us today.

Mr. Žbogar (Slovenia): I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing this afternoon.

I have three simple messages regarding the developments of last night.

First, we condemn the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, which must immediately cease. We made that clear through the adoption of resolution 2722 (2024) merely two days ago. The freedom of navigation and maritime

security is critically important for Slovenia. What is also clear is that any action to defend vessels from attacks must be undertaken in full compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. That means that the principles of distinction, necessity, proportionality and precaution should be upheld at all times.

Secondly, the people of Yemen have suffered greatly throughout years of conflict, and they deserve sustainable peace. Since April 2022, they have benefited from the truce, which is broadly holding. It is regrettable that we have reached this point. Our sincere hope is that critical progress on United Nations-mediated peace talks can continue.

Thirdly, a further dangerous escalation in the Middle East is in no one's interest. We worry that the recent developments introduce a new dynamic to the region that has the potential to further complicate an already-heated situation. We call for the de-escalation of tensions, and we urge the Houthis to exercise restraint. We stand ready to engage on a comprehensive response to the crisis currently engulfing the region. A joint effort by a united Security Council is needed to avoid crashing into the abyss.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Russia for requesting this emergency meeting. We thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

The United States and United Kingdom launched air strikes against targets in Yemen, thereby further escalating the tense situation in the Red Sea region, about which China expresses its deep concern. The Red Sea has long been a critical route for the transportation of goods and energy. The Houthis have carried out many attacks and seizures involving commercial vessels in the Red Sea, which disrupts the international flow of trade and is detrimental to the stability of the region. China has called repeatedly on the Houthis to immediately cease their attacks on, and harassment of, commercial vessels and respect the navigation rights of all countries' commercial vessels in the Red Sea, in accordance with international law. At the same time, China calls on all parties, in particular major countries with influence, to play a constructive and responsible role and work together to maintain the safety and security of shipping lanes in the Red Sea. Unfortunately, the blatant military actions taken by the countries concerned against Yemen have not only led to

the destruction of infrastructure and civilian casualties, but also heightened security risks in the Red Sea, which does not contribute to the protection, safety or security of commercial vessels, or the freedom of navigation there. The military operations in question could also undermine the political process in Yemen. We fail to see how such military operations could achieve their stated objectives.

It warrants underscoring that the Security Council has never authorized any State to use force against Yemen. The military actions taken by the countries concerned run contrary to recently adopted resolution 2722 (2024). China reiterates that no country shall misinterpret or abuse international law and Security Council resolutions and create new tensions in the Red Sea. The current tense situation in the Red Sea is one manifestation of the spillover effects of the conflict in Gaza. Allowing for the conflict in Gaza to drag on while expecting it not to spread is wishful thinking and delusional. Furthermore, calling for the prevention of the conflict's spillover while adding fuel to the fire by provoking a military confrontation is contradictory and irresponsible. The Middle East region is already on the brink of an extremely dangerous situation. At this stage, the last thing we need is reckless military adventurism. The first thing we need is calm and restraint to prevent the conflict's further spread. We urge the parties concerned, especially major countries with influence, to abide by the Charter of the United Nations and international law, keep to the judicious path of dialogue and consultations and make concrete efforts to maintain peace and stability in the Red Sea and the Middle East.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We take note of, and are grateful for, the information provided by Under-Secretary-General Khiari.

Ecuador expresses its concern about the conflict that has escalated over the past hours in the Red Sea and joins the Secretary-General's call on all actors concerned not to further exacerbate the situation, in the interest of peace and stability in the region. A few days ago in this Chamber (see S/PV. 9527), my delegation condemned the terrorist attacks perpetrated against several commercial vessels in the Red Sea by the Houthis, which constitute a flagrant violation of international law and therefore a threat to international peace and security. Ecuador reaffirms its condemnation today. Similarly, Ecuador has expressed its concern about the risk that the situation could even further

exacerbate tensions in the entire region and destabilize international peace and security. Resolution 2722 (2024), adopted by the Security Council a few days ago, demands a halt on the Houthi attacks on commercial vessels and demands the immediate release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew. Its provisions are binding, and all means available to the Council must be used for their implementation, in accordance with international law.

Attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea have a direct impact on food insecurity and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen and have global ramifications for regional supply chains and rising commodity prices. We call once again for political dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations to pave the path towards sustainable peace in that country and for preventing any action that would undo the progress made so far to end the conflict, which has resulted in the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): Let me first express my appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

Since mid-November 2023, the Houthis have been continuously attacking commercial vessels engaging in lawful maritime transit through the Red Sea. They have also illegally seized and have held the *MV Galaxy Leader*, a vessel operated by a Japanese company, and its crew for more than 15 days. As everyone knows, those acts are flagrant violations of international law and are a matter of serious concern for global maritime transportation. Actions that jeopardize the freedom of navigation of commercial vessels and the safety of crew members cannot be justified for any reason.

The international community has repeatedly raised its strong voice to demand the immediate cessation of such attacks. The Council also issued a press statement last month (SC/15513) and held an emergency meeting on 3 January (see S/PV.9525) to express its grave concern about the Houthis's irresponsible actions.

On the same day, the countries concerned, including Japan, sent a clear message that the Houthis would bear responsibility for the consequences if they continued to threaten lives, the global economy and the free flow of commerce in the region's critical waterways. Nevertheless, the Houthis have not stopped attacks against commercial vessels and have been escalating their illegal and unacceptable actions.

Only two days ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 2722 (2024), demanding that the Houthis immediately cease their attacks against commercial vessels and reaffirming navigational rights and freedoms in the Red Sea. To date, we have exerted all possible diplomatic efforts to resolve this issue. Regrettably, however, the Houthis have ignored the calls by the international community, including the unequivocal pronouncement by the Council.

In response, the United States and the United Kingdom have conducted joint strikes against a number of targets in Houthi-controlled areas yesterday to degrade the Houthis's capacity to make additional threats. Japan supports the determination of the United States, the United Kingdom and relevant countries to fulfil our responsibility to ensure the free and safe navigation of vessels. To that end, we understand that those measures are aimed at preventing the further deterioration of the situation.

Japan remains firm in its commitment to not tolerate any action that could disturb the inalienable freedom of safe navigation and will take the necessary steps to put an end to Houthi threats while continuing to closely cooperate with relevant countries.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing to the Council.

Mozambique is deeply concerned about the recent developments in Yemen, occurring less than a day after the Council adopted resolution 2722 (2024). While we abstained in the voting on the resolution, it is unfortunate that the Council's decision could be misinterpreted as sanctioning the use of force.

As members of the Council, entrusted with the maintenance of international peace, we firmly oppose any action that undermines international security or could be misconstrued as sanctioning escalation. We are deeply worried about the potential involvement of other United Nations members in the escalation of the conflict and violence in the region.

We believe that the employment of force at this precarious time undermines crucial ongoing diplomatic efforts to pull the region back from the brink amid the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian crisis. We fully believe that, in the face of possible all-out conflict in the region, moderation and increased efforts to address the underlying cause of tensions in the region must take

precedence. We categorically condemn any attacks endangering commercial vessels and the safe and unhindered navigation in the Red Sea. Such actions are totally unacceptable.

It is common knowledge that Yemen is currently facing a severe humanitarian crisis and is on the verge of becoming a new front in an already unstable region. That unfortunate situation in Yemen is fertile ground for terrorists and extremists. We strongly advocate maximum caution and restraint by all actors in order to prevent the situation in the Red Sea from worsening any further. Our mandate requires us to pursue peace rather than violence and ensure that every action that we take safeguards the region from further escalation and hardship.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing. The Middle East continues to be in a state of turmoil. The conflict in Gaza, the deteriorating situation in the West Bank, hostilities along the Blue Line and episodes of insecurity in Syria and Iraq paint a troubling picture.

The rapidly deteriorating maritime security situation in the Red Sea is also a cause for grave concern. The Houthi attacks against commercial shipping in the Red Sea are in violation of international law. They risk the safety of seafarers and other persons and jeopardize critical flows of goods. Respecting and upholding the navigational rights and freedoms of commercial vessels in the Red Sea and the Bab Al-Mandab Strait is of paramount importance. Attacks that threaten those rights are unacceptable and must be strongly condemned. We reiterate our call on the Houthis to immediately cease any attacks and actions against commercial shipping.

Ongoing violence in the region risks fuelling an unfortunate situation where military escalation would be almost inevitable. It is fundamental to avoid any further escalation, and restraint must be exercised, as outlined in resolution 2722 (2024).

We also stress that international law, including international humanitarian law, must be respected at all times. A further deterioration in maritime security will have dire consequences for global trade. It will also have serious negative ramifications for the well-being of Yemeni civilians, who heavily rely on imports for essential needs. That must be avoided at all costs.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): We would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing detailing the series of Houthi attacks in the Red Sea over the past few days, as well as last night's joint American-British coalition military strikes. Those developments are very worrisome and once again increase the risk of regional escalation. In December, the Council members unanimously issued a press statement (SC/15513) condemning the Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea and calling for the release of the entire crew of the *MV Galaxy Leader*. Just two days ago, we adopted resolution 2722 (2024), reaffirming the importance of strict respect for the rights and freedoms of navigation in the Red Sea, in accordance with international law. In its statement after the voting, Switzerland shared its legal assessment of the resolution's operational paragraph 3, referring to:

“the right of Member States, in accordance with international law, to defend their vessels from attacks, including those that undermine navigational rights and freedoms”.

In our view, that right is strictly limited to military measures to intercept attacks against merchant vessels and warships in order to protect said vessels and the persons on board. In that context, any military operation that goes beyond the immediate need to protect said vessels and persons is disproportionate and therefore not covered by the aforementioned resolution.

Switzerland is concerned about the military strikes carried out by the United States-United Kingdom coalition. The attacks and incidents in the Red Sea and the region are having a negative impact on maritime traffic and world trade, as well as on the civilian population in Yemen and the region. At a time when peace talks in Yemen are making significant progress, we must help to preserve those gains. Indeed, in the long term, nothing will better guarantee the security of the Red Sea than a lasting peace in Yemen that includes all the players concerned. A further deterioration in the situation must therefore be avoided, and we collectively have the means to prevent it.

Switzerland therefore calls on all parties and actors involved in the Red Sea and in the region to exercise caution and the utmost restraint and to comply strictly with international law. In that respect, we take note of the joint statement by the maritime coalition, in particular the stated desire to de-escalate the situation. In addition, the Council must be united on

issues of maritime security and more generally on its decisions affecting the region directly or indirectly, and by extension the maintenance of international peace and security. It is our responsibility to prevent, not exacerbate, rising tensions. Switzerland is fully committed to that aim.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): Let me begin by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his timely briefing.

My delegation reiterates the vital importance of ensuring free and safe navigation in the Red Sea, which is a pivotal global maritime route through which approximately 15 per cent of global sea trade passes. Any attacks against commercial vessels are unjustifiable and unacceptable under any circumstances.

Despite a series of international calls urging the Houthis to cease their attacks on merchant and commercial vessels, such attacks in the Red Sea have continued, posing threats to lives and the free flow of commerce through that critical waterway. Security Council resolution 2722 (2024), which the Council adopted only two days ago, clearly references the right of Member States, in accordance with international law, to defend their vessels from attacks, including those that undermine navigational rights and freedoms.

Any attempts to create fear by holding hostage the free flow of commerce in the Red Sea and to exploit the regional situation are destined to fail. Once again, we urge the Houthis to refrain from dangerous provocations and to immediately release the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew. At the same time, it is also imperative to prevent any further spillover from the precarious situation in the region, both for the protection of civilians and for the global economy.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this urgent meeting to receive an update from Assistant Secretary-General Khiari on recent developments in Yemen, and we thank the Assistant Secretary-General for his briefing.

We join other Council members in expressing concern about the impact of recent attacks in the Red Sea and now in Yemen, on diplomatic efforts to achieve sustainable peace in Yemen and on efforts to contain the ongoing conflict in the region.

Last week, Council members gathered in this Chamber (see S/PV.9525) and agreed on the need to avoid any further escalation in tensions. We also

acknowledged the need to avoid jeopardizing the prospects of reaching a comprehensive peace agreement in Yemen, one that would finally end a nine-year war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and triggered one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

We listened to Assistant Secretary-General Khiari caution about the risks of further compounding the already volatile situation in the region, and we expressed our support for the ongoing efforts of the Special Envoy. One week later, we seem to be faced with an entirely new dispensation, one in which the prospects for progress and sustainable peace may be in jeopardy. Today an estimated 18.2 million people in Yemen are still in need of humanitarian assistance. At the same time, international funding for humanitarian operations is on the decline.

The Yemeni people can ill afford a re-escalation of hostilities. They deserve peace. The people of the Middle East deserve peace. Guyana calls for all sides to exercise restraint and to avoid taking any further actions that could derail ongoing efforts to find a sustainable, long-term solution to the crisis in Yemen. We therefore reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, for an end to the attacks on commercial and merchant vessels in the Red Sea and for the release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* vessel and crew. Finally, the Council must maintain its support for the Special Envoy's efforts to negotiate a sustainable peace in Yemen.

Mr. Kanu (Sierra Leone): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this briefing. Let me also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his important and informative briefing and insight.

On 10 January, the Council adopted resolution 2722 (2024) to address the continued attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea. Sierra Leone voted in favour of the resolution, in view of the principle of protecting the navigational rights and freedoms of vessels of all Member States and the threat posed to international peace and security, particularly in the region. In our explanation of vote in the adoption of resolution 2722 (2024), we urged due compliance with, and the application of, existing international law. In that regard, any actions by Member States that have taken place after the Security Council adopted resolution 2722 (2024) must be in line with the provisions of the resolution and existing international law.

We condemn the attacks by the Houthis and urge compliance with the Council's resolution. We also call for the release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew. Sierra Leone also reiterates the need to safeguard the Yemeni peace process and the further need to address the root causes, including the conflict in the Gaza Strip.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

Two days ago, during meeting during which the resolution on maritime security (resolution 2722 (2024)) was adopted (see S/PV.9527), Algeria stressed that military intervention cannot ease the tensions in the Red Sea region. Algeria expresses its deep concern regarding the ongoing military operations and airstrikes in the Red Sea region, targeting various sites and cities in Yemen. Algeria calls for restraint and caution at this critical juncture to avoid further escalation.

Our opinion is that, first, the use of force will only complicate the situation in Yemen and may lead, unfortunately, to undermining the efforts deployed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to end the war in Yemen and to relaunch the political process for a united Yemen, with a Government controlling its coastal borders and ensuring security in the Red Sea.

Secondly, we believe that addressing the root causes of conflicts in the region is now imperative. And in that context, the need for a ceasefire in Gaza has never been more urgent. Every day, we count more and more victims among civilians, women and children, and only a ceasefire — an immediate and durable ceasefire — will ease the tension in the region and avoid a spillover, which would have catastrophic consequences for the entire region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of France.

I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

France condemns the attacks carried out by the Houthis in the Red Sea against commercial vessels. France welcomes the adoption of resolution 2722 (2024), which sends a strong message to the Houthis.

Through their armed activities, the Houthis bear the responsibility for the escalation of tensions in the region, as well as for international stability. They are

a direct threat to 15 per cent of global trade. France continues to call for the immediate release of the *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew, hailing from the Philippines, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Romania and Mexico, which were illegally detained by the Houthis. We call on the Islamic Republic of Iran, which finances and arms the Houthis, to cease its destabilizing actions.

In resolution 2722 (2024), the Security Council recalled that the exercise of navigation rights and freedoms must be respected and that States, in accordance with international law, have the right to respond to those attacks.

France will continue to assume its responsibilities and contribute to maritime security in that area, in cooperation with its partners, as it was called on to do on 9 and 11 December, when the frigate *Languedoc* was deployed to destroy Houthi drones.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are not surprised by the downright weak arguments which were put forward by the United States and the United Kingdom today in an attempt to justify their aggression. After all, they simply do not have any other arguments, nor could there be any. Let me underscore that there is no legal basis for their attacks on sovereign Yemen. What right to self-defence could London and Washington refer to while being thousands of miles away from their own borders? Since when did that right extend to commercial vessels — especially when those vessels fly the flag of a third country, as was confirmed by the Permanent Representative of the United States herself?

One thing is clear: the self-proclaimed “coalition” has no legitimate mandate for armed activities. It is one thing to defend commercial shipping, attacks on which are unacceptable. However, it is completely different

from disproportionately and illegally bombing another State. The Anglo-Saxon duo and their satellites are once again flagrantly violating the Charter of the United Nations and other norms of international law, further destabilizing the situation in the Middle East, which is already in flames. The new rounds of bombing and destruction are the West’s real contribution and its effective “diplomacy” in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): We have been clear in our statement, despite the fact that my Russian colleague thinks it was weak.

We carried out this action under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. And this comes down simply to freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce and, yes, for the United States, but also for more than 50 nations that have been affected by those attacks, whose ships have been rerouted thousands of miles to avoid violence; crews have been held hostage — some to this day; and vessels have been fired on and, frankly, would have been hit without its intervention. The situation in the Red Sea has become untenable for every single country that has been affected by those attacks.

Therefore, de-escalation needs to happen. It needs to happen from the Houthis who are putting all of our shipping lines in jeopardy.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I will say briefly, as I said just now in my intervention, we have published a summary of our legal position on last night’s strikes, and we have reported to the Council in writing, in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. I think that is comprehensive.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.