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Well, good morning!

This is an intimidating crowd -- I got to tell you. It really is.

No, I am so thrilled to be here. I will tell you that being at the Council on Foreign Relations is something that's very special, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today and let you know a little bit about what we're doing.

We found our move in New York to be a pleasant one. There have been a few adjustments, mainly the weather. It's cold here. In South Carolina we consider, you know, 58-60 [degrees Fahrenheit] freezing -- and here that's definitely different. But we are getting used to it. My son, Nalin, we've determined, is now a city boy, which makes this mom very nervous. I do take care of my elderly parents, and they are learning how to use Uber, which has been really interesting. So, we've had to pick them up a couple of times. But other than that, they are doing very well. My daughter is a freshman at Clemson, and she is going to come to New York at Easter and we're going to convince her that she's going to love it.



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So, those are all the things that we're doing. And I'll tell you that, Michael and I, what we love is everyone has been so incredibly kind and welcoming to us. We've decided you can't run out of restaurants and you can't run out of things to do in this city, and so we very, very much appreciate it.

I'm excited that I'm going to be taking over the presidency of the U.N. Security Council in April, and I'd like to spend a few moments just talking to you about our agenda and what we want to try and accomplish.

Being at the U.N. has reminded me in powerful ways of my early days in state government in South Carolina. The U.N. Security Council -- just like the South Carolina legislature -- is basically a club. And the thing about clubs is that they have rules, and they have a culture. There is a constant pressure to comply with this culture. And soon enough, members are doing things a certain way because that's the way they've always done them. And then the club becomes stale. Its members forget that being responsive and changing with the times are needed to show value to the people that they serve.

I've approached my job at the U.N. in the same way I did in South Carolina: I'm working to change the culture.

Institutions always benefit from an outsider's perspective. In South Carolina, I was the first minority governor, and a real shock to the state, the first girl governor as well. And I was definitely an outsider. But my perspective allowed me to see the ways the legislature had become complacent. Challenging the rules of the club didn't make me popular at the State House. But it was necessary then, and it's necessary now.

At the U.S. Mission, we're all about changing the culture and bringing positive energy to the United Nations. We've put accountability front and center. People who've worked with me know that I have no tolerance for unmet promises and inaction. My team is about action, reliability, and results. We demand that of ourselves and we expect it of others.

We're also having the backs of our allies, and we're not afraid to call out the governments that don't have our backs. We will deal fairly with the people who are fair with us. If not, all bets are off.



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Don't get me wrong. I don't have illusions about how easily an institution the size and complexity of the United Nations can be changed. Still, with the support of the new Secretary-General and many of my colleagues on the Security Council, we've already started to make some progress.

A couple of weeks ago when a U.N. agency put out yet another ridiculously biased report attacking Israel, we -- we were able to work with the Secretary-General to have it withdrawn. The head of the U.N. agency then resigned.

I think this incident really goes to the heart of what needs to be changed at the United Nations. So many dollars and man hours were spent to produce a false and defamatory report. So much energy and emotion is spent on the same old things. Meanwhile, the U.N. is missing the growing discontent -- and growing distrust -- among the people it's supposed to represent.

The fact is a wave is building throughout the world. It's a wave of populism that is challenging institutions like the United Nations and shaking them to their foundations. So many people are desperate. So many face injustice, genocide, starvation, and corruption -- and they feel powerless. So many people yearn just to be heard.

Mohammed Bouazizi was one of the first to show the world the frustration that's out there. Mohammed was a simple street vendor in Tunisia. He was repeatedly abused by a corrupt system for the crime of wanting to sell his oranges and apples. He became so desperate to be heard that he set himself on fire in front of the offices of the police -- the very police who had humiliated and stolen from him. Mohammed's act of desperation was heard by the people. It set off the Arab Spring.

Then there was Neda [Agha-Soltan]. She was 26 years old, talking on her cell phone, when she was shot by government forces in Iran in 2009. A video of her bleeding to death on the street in Tehran went viral. Once again, the people reacted. Neda's death powered the Green Revolution. But the international elite had other priorities for Iran. In the end, Neda's death -- and the dreams of the Iranian people -- were overlooked and unfulfilled.



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Like all governing bodies, the United Nations has to contend with this growing wave of discontent. I came to the U.N. with the goal of showing the American people value for our investment in this institution. And when I say "value," I'm not primarily talking about budgets. I'm talking about making the U.N. an effective tool on behalf of our values.

The United States is the moral conscience of the world.

We will not walk away from this role. But we will insist that our participation in the U.N. honor and reflect this role. If we can't speak on behalf of people like Mohammed and Neda, then we have no business being here.

For me, human rights are at the heart of the mission of the United Nations. That's why I'll be devoting a portion of my presidency to putting the issue of human rights on the -- on the agenda at the Security Council.

It might surprise many Americans to learn that human rights violations have not been considered an appropriate subject for discussion in the Security Council. This is the *rule* the club has created. The Security Council has never had a -- a session focused exclusively on human rights. There have been meetings focused on singular situations in particular countries, but never -- bless you [to audience member who sneezed] -- has a meeting been dedicated to the broader question of how human rights abuses can lead to a breakdown in national peace and security. The thinking is that peace and security are the Security Council's business. Human rights are left, separate, to others.

The need for this is to change not just a question of morality -- although morality should compel all of us to protect basic human dignity. It's a question of the very peace and security that the Security Council is charged to promote. The fact is peace and security cannot be achieved in isolation from human rights. In case after case, human rights abuses are not the byproduct of conflict -- they are the cause of conflict; or they are the fuel that feeds the conflict. Desperate people subject to humiliation and abuse will inevitably resort to violence. People who are robbed of their humanity and dignity will inevitably want revenge. They are also vulnerable to manipulation or coercion by extremist groups.



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In some cases, human rights abuses literally provide the financing for aggression. The North Korean regime forces political prisoners to work themselves to death in coal mines to finance its nuclear program. In other cases, human rights abuses are a weapon of war. Syrian intelligence uses torture -- including the deliberate, systemic torture of children -- to identify and silence opponents. And as you know, pro-government forces in Syria have systematically targeted civilian infrastructure, including hospitals.

Recently, CCTV cameras captured what happens when hospitals are targeted by government bombs. A horrifying YouTube [video] showed the final seconds of the life of the last pediatrician in East Aleppo, Dr. Mohammed, who was there. The video is simply shot down a hallway of a children's hospital. Dr. Ma'az darts in and out, hurrying from room to room, seeing patients. Then, just after he walks out of the frame, you see the walls, the ceiling, the floor, the air of the hospital explode. And then the screen goes blank.

The video is horrible, but the reality behind it is even worse. Together with Russia and Iran, the Assad regime has destroyed each and every hospital in East Aleppo. Every one. A quarter million people have left to suffer. These are war crimes.

And Assad's crimes, of course, have not been confined to Syria. Syrian human rights violations have led to the greatest refugee crisis since World War II. What was once a brutal crackdown on peaceful protestors is now a six-sided conflict and a great power proxy war.

I believe strongly that the time has come for the Security Council to explicitly consider the connection between human rights and security. This debate is one that's worth having. It would greatly strengthen the work of the Security Council. And it's the right thing to do.

We intend to challenge Members [sic] States to start walking the walk and not just talking the talk of human rights. We will see which countries rise to the challenge and which resort to the same old, tired excuses. It will be very telling if any country tries to block this debate. It's past time that the Security Council acknowledge the importance of human rights abuses and demand that its member nations do the same.



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A second issue I intend to focus on in the coming weeks is the U.N. peacekeeping operations. This is an area of great potential for reform. One of the ways the U.N. does its best work -- and shows its greatest value -- is through peacekeeping operations. But too often the focus of our peacekeeping efforts is on the troop contributing countries -- that is those who are paid to send troops into an area; or the funding countries; or the bureaucracy of the U.N. itself -- not on protecting civilians and achieving a political solution.

In the past, when we've discussed our peacekeeping operations, we've kept the focus on management-related issues. We've rightly spent time on peacekeeper troop conduct. But too often we've gotten bogged down in parochial questions. We've spent a lot of time worrying about which country or bureaucracy benefits from the mission. We've worried about the donor countries. We've worried about troop supplying countries. We've missed the forest for the trees in peacekeeping operations altogether.

During the U.S. presidency, I intend to do something different. We will lay out a comprehensive vision for how peacekeeping missions should be reviewed moving forward. We will back -- go back to first principles and ask hard questions: What was the original intent of the mission? Is the mission achieving its objective? Are we lifting up the people in the region towards independence? What are the mission countries doing to help themselves? Do we have an exit plan? And is there accountability?

As it stands, the lack of this kind of basic evaluation in the U.N. missions is shocking. For example, the U.N. has a political mission in Afghanistan -- not a peacekeeping mission. But the accountability concept is the same. This mission has been in place for more than 15 years, and it has never once been reviewed. No one has ever thought to check and see if we're actually achieving any goals. This is unacceptable.

We are in the process of proposing a strategic review of this and other missions to get the facts on the ground. Peacekeeping is the largest item in the U.N. budget. Our review will identify those missions that are in need of structural reform. We will determine where we need to augment, where we need to restructure, and where we need to cut back. Again, I'm not just interested in cheaper peacekeeping operations. I'm interested in better and smarter peacekeeping operations.



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This is an area in which Secretary-General Guterres and I very much are in agreement. We have developed a set of principles to guide our review and our operations going forward. They start with the fundamentals: effectiveness and accountability.

In South Sudan, the civil war continues, and there is no political solution in sight. It's time to rethink that mandate and find a political solution with partners in the region. Other principles seem basic, but what is basic at the U.N. and what is basic in the real world can be two different things. The agreement of the host country to an operation is essential to its success. Again, in South Sudan, the government openly opposes the mission and the mission has suffered; therefore, the people continue to suffer. We have to do a better job to -- at avoiding mission creep and ensure that the objectives of peacekeeping missions are achievable. We must have an exit strategy. And if things don't improve, we have to have the political will to adjust the mission, even if some countries and bureaucracies are going to lose funding in the process.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, the government is corrupt and preys on its citizens. At the same time, the U.N. peacekeeping mission is mandated to partner with the government to consolidate peace and security. In other words, the U.N. is aiding a government that is inflicting predatory behavior against its own people. We should have the decency and common sense to end this.

We also need to have the political will to adjust the mission when things aren't improving on the ground. After a very difficult period, the democratically elected leaders of the Central African Republic are seeking help in training their own troops to take over the -- take over from U.N. peacekeepers. The president has told me that his country is eager to stand on its own two feet. This is exactly what we want to see. Our goal should be to end these missions, not continue them with no end in sight, creating a more dependent and helpless environment.

This is a moment of great responsibility for those who believe in peace and security through international cooperation. Countries all over the world are turning inward. People are questioning the value of interactions with other nations and with international institutions. Some of those questions are good ones and are long overdue. But there is also a danger. Hanging in the balance is the very relevance of the United Nations.



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This is a time, in short, to show the people reasons to support the U.N. Even in these cynical times, I believe we all carry in our hearts a bit of idealism that inspired the creation of the United Nations. I know we all want those ideals to succeed in the world. I know I do.

I have promised the American people to continue the United States' indispensable role as the moral conscience of the world.

Today, I pledge to my colleagues on the Security Council that I will work with them to make the U.N. an effective instrument of peace, security, and human rights of all people. I hope they will join me in doing what's right, both for the United Nations and for the people we are pledged to protect.

Thank you.