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THE MIDEAST TURMOIL: WASHINGTON'S VIEW; Rice Urges European Union to Classify Hamas as Terrorist

By DON VAN NATTA JR.

Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser, said today that the political wing of the militant Palestinian group Hamas should be added to the European Union's list of terrorist organizations. She called the group the single biggest threat to peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Ms. Rice also said Europe should join the United States in persuading Arab nations to stop supporting Hamas's political arm, which raises money for charitable causes.

"We are pressing the Arab states to cut off support for Hamas, whatever Hamas wants to say the money is being used for," Ms. Rice said. "Money is fungible." She spoke at a conference sponsored by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a private policy group.

The United States lists the political and military wings of Hamas as terrorist organizations, while the European Union regards only the latter as a terrorist group. Ms. Rice argued that there should be no distinction.

"The notion that on the one hand Hamas is peaceful but on the other hand it is trying to blow up the peace process is just illogical," Ms. Rice said.

Her remarks, which came on the eve of her new role as President Bush's "personal representative" to peace talks in the Middle East, touched on several United States foreign policy objectives, from the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan to the containment of the nuclear weapons programs of North Korea and Iran.

During her 15 minutes of prepared remarks, Ms. Rice described Mr. Bush's vision of the American-European agenda in the aftermath of the war in Iraq.

She said the United States and Europe must "turn to the Middle East with the same vision and patience that was exhibited" after World War II. She said that if the United States and its allies did not engineer a road to peace in the Middle East, a "freedom deficit" in the region would create "ideologies of hate" that would spawn new generations of terrorists.

Responding to a question about the pace of the rebuilding of Iraq, Ms. Rice said it would be slow and at times frustrating.

"This is a traumatized country," she said. "This is a country that was traumatized by more than 30 years of a brutal regime, one of the most brutal regimes of the 20th century."

Ms. Rice said Iraq's public works were in far worse shape than had been believed. "The infrastructure is in terrible shape," she said, adding that 80 percent of the country did not have proper sewer and water facilities. But she said she believed that the country would eventually hold elections and establish vibrant democratic institutions.

"The Iraqi people are smart," she said. "The Iraqi people are educated. They will find the way to move forward in a positive way."