

October 31, 2007

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC

Dear Madam Secretary:

We are writing to both commend you for your efforts to reinvigorate the Israeli-Palestinian peace process by convening an international meeting this fall and to respectfully suggest that additional measures by the United States in the near term will be necessary to preserve the possibility of success.

As do you, we believe the coming months represent a critical opportunity to stabilize the region by advancing a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians -- and perhaps a comprehensive opening of Israeli relations with the Arab world. However, it is equally clear that a still-born initiative could set back prospects for peace, destabilize regional allies, and exacerbate an already volatile situation in the Middle East

Clearly, robust, hands-on U.S. leadership and diplomacy is necessary to frame not only on what transpires at the meeting, but on what takes place before and after it. But dialogue and encouragement of the parties will not, by themselves, be sufficient. As you have made clear, the Palestinian Authority, led by President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, has emerged as a viable partner for U.S. peace efforts. The situation confronting them, however, is desperate.

Accordingly, we urge you to consider a reorientation of U.S. project-focused assistance programs. The immediate needs of the Palestinian people are for clean government, public order, economic opportunity, and salaried employment. U.S. assistance should be used—and should be designed to leverage international support—for financial and personnel reforms in the Palestinian Authority, for housing or other labor intensive projects, for the effective operation of a Palestinian police force and an independent Palestinian judiciary, and for long-term economic development and job creation programs. Addressing corruption and public safety in the P.A. while continuing to engage with Israel to coordinate a remittance schedule for Palestinian tax monies and to improve access and movement will ensure that assistance will be effective in reviving the Palestinian economy and creating the atmosphere of hope required for the success of diplomatic efforts.

In this regard, we recognize that in this critical moment, and with the current Palestinian leadership, current levels of U.S. assistance are insufficient to leverage either real change and improvement by the Palestinian Authority, or more robust support by the international community. The United States should take the lead in organizing international assistance to the Palestinian Authority which is not only consistent with the principles described above, but would suffice to cover the legitimate budgetary needs of the Palestinian Authority until it is able to muster its own resources.

U.S. assistance, though of vital importance, must be supported by a regional consensus. The current oil boom, aggressive Iranian efforts to establish hegemony and the extra-legal takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas, all lend salience to your efforts to positively engage the Arab states in efforts to make peace. In concert with others, we can not allow the financial asphyxiation of the Palestinian Authority, particularly while some continue to provide or allow funding of Hamas. The extraordinary efforts being made by the President and yourself are more likely to succeed if our regional partners are working together with us.

Madam Secretary, resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, through the establishment of two states for two peoples, is too important not to seize the opportunities that have emerged over the past weeks. With aggressive multilateral diplomacy led by the United States, we believe the meeting in November could mark an important turning point. We look forward to working with you to ensure that it is a success.

Sincerely,