

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 24, 2008

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I recently outlined my views on the Middle East in a major speech, and I am writing to reiterate some of the concerns and priorities I raised in that speech.

A fundamental principle of America's Middle East policy must be our unshakeable commitment to Israel's security. I believe that is a bipartisan commitment, and I will work to continue and advance that consensus. But I am deeply concerned that Israel's security has been put at greater risk, both because of renewed threats from implacable enemies like Iran, Hizbollah, and Hamas, and because of policy choices by the United States.

One essential step for ensuring Israel's security in the long term would be achieving a lasting peace with its neighbors. In the case of the Palestinians, that means a negotiated agreement to provide for two states living side-by-side in peace and security, so that both sides can achieve their legitimate aspirations. Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas committed themselves to achieving this goal in the process that began at Annapolis, but they will need a sustained, concerted effort by the United States to help them succeed. In your remaining time in office, I hope you will devote the necessary resources to supporting Israel and Palestinian leaders who are committed to this effort to the maximum possible extent.

These peace efforts take place in a difficult environment. Hamas, which opposes negotiations and is committed to Israel's destruction, continues to rule in Gaza. Under their rule, thousands of rockets have been fired at civilian populations in Sderot and surrounding communities in southern Israel, causing over a dozen deaths, many injuries, and the disruption of normal life for all who live in this area. Hamas, which is receiving funding, training, and weaponry from Iran, is acquiring longer-range missile capabilities, which enable it to strike even larger population centers, such as Ashkelon. Although a truce went into effect last week – and we all hope it will bring calm to the people of southern Israel, improve life for Palestinians in Gaza, and lead to the release of Gilad Shalit – the threat posed by Hamas rule has not passed, and will not pass so long as Hamas remains committed to Israel's destruction.

In the face of this threat, several firm positions are called for by the United States. First, we must reiterate that Israel has the right to defend itself from such attacks,

and that the United States will stand up for that right in the United Nations and elsewhere. Second, we must press Egypt to devote more resources and effort to stopping the smuggling of weapons into Gaza from the Sinai, where much of Hamas' weaponry arrives from. This will help ensure that Hamas does not use the truce to rearm and regroup. Third, we must continue to isolate Hamas, and ensure that others do so, until and unless they recognize Israel, renounce violence, and abide by past agreements.

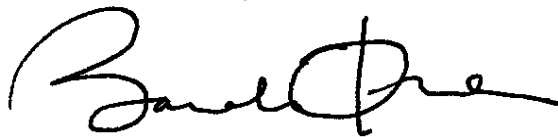
It is also imperative that other Arab governments step forward to give greater support to the Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. This support can take two main forms. First, these governments should deliver on their commitments to provide large-scale financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority, enabling it to improve economic conditions for Palestinians on the ground. Saudi Arabia and the other oil-producing states of the Gulf, in particular, have the resources to make a profound investment in Israeli-Palestinian peace by helping to improve the lives of the Palestinian people, and we must urge them to do just that. The Arab states proclaim their great concern for the Palestinian people and now with unprecedented oil revenues flowing into their coffers, there is no reason not to call on them publicly to provide far more assistance to the Palestinian Authority. They can also provide important political and diplomatic support to President Abbas as he tries to reach a negotiated settlement.

Second, the Arab states should support the Palestinians and prepare their own people for peace by making gestures of normalization toward Israel. The entire regional atmosphere would improve, and peacemakers on all sides would see their efforts enhanced, if Arab governments would reach out to Israelis with a sincere indication of their readiness to accept Israel as a legitimate nation in the Middle East.

Finally, the recent announcement that Israel and Syria have resumed their own peace negotiations is encouraging news, and it should spur the United States to support the parties' efforts to achieve their goal of a negotiated settlement. Turkey deserves praise for its role in arranging these talks, and the success of these negotiations could, among other things, be a setback for Iran's influence and Hizbollah's ability to acquire advanced weaponry.

I close by urging you to redouble your efforts to help Israelis and Palestinians achieve success in their peace efforts; to stand up for Israel's right of self-defense; to press the Arab states to do more to advance the peace process; and to support the Israeli-Syrian talks. All of these steps will advance the interests of the United States and the security of our ally, Israel.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barack Obama". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Barack Obama
United States Senator