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March 19, 2008

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Mr. Nathan J. Diament
Director
Union of Orthodox Jewish
Congregations of America
Institute for Public Affairs
800 Eighth Street, NW, Ste. 318
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Nathan:

Thank you for your letter of March 14, and for the kind words regarding the hearing and my statement delivered March 12th. I am happy to elaborate on my remarks and to address the "puzzlement" you felt regarding a portion of them.

In your letter, you quoted a portion of my statement, but not the antecedent and qualifying phrases that I had hoped would put my views in the proper context.

"In Jerusalem, Israeli leaders are trying to square a circle that won't come round. On the one hand, they welcome and celebrate moderate Palestinian leaders who are committed to a two-state solution, who are responsible and reasonable, and have rejected violence and accept Israel's right to exist. On the other hand, there's been an increase in the number of checkpoints and roadblocks; there have been several announcements about settlement expansions and new housing in Jerusalem; there have been no illegal outposts dismantled; and from time to time, necessary Israeli security operations have—as an unintended consequence—made a mockery of nascent Palestinian efforts to put just a little authority back in the Palestinian Authority."

As I thought was clear, I was not questioning Israel's right, indeed its fundamental obligation, to provide for the security of its citizens—and I never would. I thought that I had made this point by emphasizing that Israeli security operations were "necessary" and that the political

harm done to the Palestinian Authority was "an unintended consequence." My intention was to illustrate how a number of Israeli decisions, each of which may be justified on its own terms, amount to a pattern which for Palestinians highlights the inability of their own leadership to deliver political achievements through diplomatic engagement with Israel.

My strongly held view is that the current leadership of the Palestinian Authority, with all its failings, is still a much better partner for Israel in seeking peace than would be their competitors in Hamas. On that basis, I believe it is in the interest of both the United States and Israel to work to ensure that the current Palestinian leadership survives and succeeds, because what follows them maybe not just be worse, but unthinkable. And currently, its that unthinkable alternative that is growing stronger.

It is in this same context that I protested the current lack of real change, real sacrifice and real political pain. You are certainly right that Israel has demonstrated time and again its readiness to sacrifice for peace, and that it has often received only terrorism and incitement for its pains. I too am horrified and outraged by the daily attacks on Sderot and the barbaric murders at the Mercaz Harav yeshiva. And there is no question that Israel has shown remarkable forbearance in dealing with the bombardment of its territory from Gaza. I would also agree that the international response to Israel's restraint is utterly contemptible, though not very surprising.

Nevertheless, Israel faces a real security dilemma that, as successive Israeli prime ministers have recognized, necessitates the establishment of a separate and peaceful Palestinian state in order to preserve Israel as both a Jewish and a democratic state. I believe the current moment in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict may be a turning point, and that if significant progress isn't made soon, the situation could deteriorate considerably, and much to Israel's long-term detriment. Somehow, the Palestinian Authority, flawed though it is, has to be made into a partner which can not only sign an agreement, but actually implement its terms and obligations. Clearly it can not do so now.

As always, foremost in my mind is the security and safety of Israel, and throughout my 25 years in Congress, I have aggressively opposed any effort originating in this country or elsewhere to compel or coerce Israel into doing anything its democratically elected-leaders opposed. Nevertheless, I believe Israel is facing a momentous choice about its future, and that failing to choose is itself a kind of choice. The job of the United States as Israel's friend and ally is to help Israel to make its choices without fear, and with the least possible risk. As Chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, I see my own job the same way.

I appreciate your interest in my remarks, and for all the work the Orthodox Union does to strengthen the bond between the United States and Israel. Please let me know if I can ever be of assistance to you and your work.

Letter to Nathan Diament
March 19, 2008

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Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary L. Ackerman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

GARY L. ACKERMAN
Chairman
House Subcommittee on the
Middle East and South Asia

Cc: Stephen J. Savitsky