

HOWARD L. BERMAN, CALIFORNIA
CHAIRMAN

GARY L. ACKERMAN, NEW YORK
ENI F.H. FALEOMVAEGA,
AMERICAN SAMOA
DONALD M. PAYNE, NEW JERSEY
BRAD SHERMAN, CALIFORNIA
ROBERT WEXLER, FLORIDA
ELIOT L. ENGEL, NEW YORK
BILL DELAHUNT, MASSACHUSETTS
GREGORY W. MEEKS, NEW YORK
DIANE E. WATSON, CALIFORNIA
ADAM SMITH, WASHINGTON
RUSS CARNAHAN, MISSOURI
JOHN S. TANNER, TENNESSEE
GENE GREEN, TEXAS
LYNN C. WOOLSEY, CALIFORNIA
SHEILA JACKSON LEE, TEXAS
RUBÉN HINOJOSA, TEXAS
JOSEPH CROWLEY, NEW YORK
DAVID WU, OREGON
BRAD MILLER, NORTH CAROLINA
LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ, CALIFORNIA
DAVID SCOTT, GEORGIA
JIM COSTA, CALIFORNIA
ALBIO SIRE, NEW JERSEY
GABRIELLE GIFFORDS, ARIZONA
RON KLEIN, FLORIDA
BARBARA LEE, CALIFORNIA

ROBERT R. KING
STAFF DIRECTOR

PETER M. YEO
DEPUTY STAFF DIRECTOR

DAVID S. ABRAMOWITZ
CHIEF COUNSEL

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, FLORIDA
RANKING REPUBLICAN MEMBER

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, NEW
JERSEY
DAN BURTON, INDIANA
ELTON GALLEGLY, CALIFORNIA
DANA ROHRBACHER,
CALIFORNIA
DONALD A. MANZULLO, ILLINOIS
EDWARD R. ROYCE, CALIFORNIA
STEVE CHABOT, OHIO
THOMAS G. TANCREDO,
COLORADO
RON PAUL, TEXAS
JEFF FLAKE, ARIZONA
MIKE PENCE, INDIANA
JOE WILSON, SOUTH CAROLINA
JOHN BOOZMAN, ARKANSAS
J. GRESHAM BARRETT, SOUTH
CAROLINA
CONNIE MACK, FLORIDA
JEFF FORTENBERRY, NEBRASKA
MICHAEL T. MCCAUL, TEXAS
TED POE, TEXAS
BOB INGLIS, SOUTH CAROLINA
LUIS G. FORTUÑO, PUERTO RICO
GUS M. BILIRAKIS, FLORIDA
VACANT

YLEEM D.S. POBLETE
REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

MARK C. GAGE
REPUBLICAN SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR

DOUGLAS C. ANDERSON
REPUBLICAN CHIEF COUNSEL

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

TELEPHONE: (202) 225-5021
[HTTP://WWW.FOREIGNAFFAIRS.HOUSE.GOV/](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/)

March 12, 2008

Statement of Gary L. Ackerman
Chairman, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia
“853 Days: From Gaza Disengagement to De Facto Power”
March 12, 2008

From the Bible comes the famous aphorism that “For everything there is a season and a time and purpose under the heavens.” It would be nice if that were so, if the seasons and times and purposes to which we are bound were, in fact, distinct and clear; so that if there was a time for war, we could expect there would also be a time for peace. And we all might wish that these periods would not be, as reality is, merged and messy, inconclusive and imprecise.

Clearly right now in the Middle East, there is at the same time both a peace process and a dynamic of escalation. There is both negotiation on final status issues and threats to roll back the concepts on which discussions are proceeding. There are shared interests between Israel and the moderate camp of Arab states and there are decisions by some of those same states that boost the fortunes of Hamas, Iran’s proxy. There are far more contradictions than there is clarity.

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.

In Ramallah, the lack of clarity is even more striking. After ascending to the top of the Palestinian body politic as a negotiator and a peacemaker, as a man who has rejected violence on

a moral basis—not a tactical, but a moral basis--Mahmoud Abbas now seems ready to squander all the credibility he's struggled for so long to acquire. Speaking to the editorial staff of al-Dustour, a Jordanian paper, Abbas is alleged to have said, "At this time, I object to the armed struggle, since we are unable to conduct it; however, in future stages things may change." When pressed by our government to clarify these remarks, Abbas's senior advisor, Sa'eb Erakat, explained "that certain comments were reported out of context. We have chosen the path of negotiations and no other path, and we will continue along it until we achieve our goal of an independent Palestinian State." Skeptics would ask "Until statehood? Not after?" During the Nixon presidency, we referred to such statements as a "non-denial denial."

In Washington, I fear things are little better. Speaking Monday at the White House, President Bush was asked what he thought of Israel's plan to build 750 new homes in a settlement near Jerusalem. He responded that "We expect both parties involved in the Middle Eastern peace process to adhere to their obligations in the road map." So far, so good. Then the President went off into that other private world of his where everything seems to be going well. He then said "And those obligations are clear. And to this end, the Secretary of State is dispatching the general that we named to be the coordinator of road map activities to the Middle East, for him to conduct meetings with the relevant parties." In other words, everyone's obligations under Phase I of the Roadmap are so crystal-clear, that we've assigned a three-star general—who reports directly to the Secretary of State—to sit with the Israelis and Palestinians to discuss what is already clear, at least to the President, if not to the relevant parties.

So my questions to you Mr. Secretary are going to be very similar to the ones I've asked before. What are we doing about this mess other than praying? What is our plan for either reviving the Palestinian Authority, or moving on without it? The President has committed to providing the PA with \$150 million in cash assistance, a step that should have been taken months, if not years ago. But what is it going to buy now? What reforms come out of it? How will the PA be different, or stronger, or more politically viable as a consequence? Are we building a bridge? Or are we building a dock?

The leadership of the PLO is scheduling, for first time since 1989, a General Conference. This meeting is supposed to be the last best hope for reviving Fatah, and seizing control of the organization from the dead hand of the Old Guard. So who's organizing the meeting? That, of course, would be Ahmed Qurei, known as Abu Ala, leader of the Old Guard. At some point, do we have to look at the dissolute, fragmented, corrupted mess which is Fatah and conclude that that dog won't hunt?

In the mean time, who do we hope will take control of the borders of Gaza? The PA? Really? The leaders of Hamas are going to let that happen why? Because of their humanitarian impulses? Because their Iranian patrons want it? And who and what is going to stop the smuggling of weapons into Gaza? I'm not a military man but I know the difference between Qassams and Grad rockets, the kind that recently fell on Ashkelon. Qassams can be made by Hamas, Grads have to be imported. Other than reoccupation by the IDF, what's going to stop the flow of Grad rockets into Gaza and then, on a high-arc, into Israel? And if the IDF goes in, how do they go out? Who gets the keys this time when they leave? If Abu Mazen gets them, will he be able to keep them, much less use them?

In my view, what is happening in Gaza is pushing the entire peace process right up to the precipice. The idea of “land for peace” is rapidly decaying into a new concept called “land for rockets.” Not surprisingly, the Israelis don’t seem to like it much. And signals from Jerusalem seem to indicate that they’re losing patience and interest in the PA anyway. At Annapolis, we had a meeting that wasn’t a conference, and certainly not a summit, that put into motion negotiations on an agreement which was originally a declaration, but is now moving toward becoming an understanding. I see a lot movement but not much forward motion. When do we see real changes, real sacrifices, real political pain? I’m not seeing any of these things from any of the parties and I’m starting to suspect that I’m not going to.

###