

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)**  
**House Committee on Foreign Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**  
**Hearing on “The Fatah-Hamas Reconciliation: Threatening Peace Prospects”**  
**February 5, 2013**

With so much instability and turmoil surrounding the Middle East, Israel finds itself in a more precarious situation now more than ever as Israel is surrounded by rogue regimes and terrorist organizations that wish to wipe her off the map.

To Israel’s northeast the prospects of Assad falling in Syria seems to be a matter of when, not if, as fears grow that Assad’s chemical weapons arsenal might fall into the wrong hands.

Yet that isn’t the only concern for Israel, as they look to their neighbors across the Sinai and see an Egypt once again engulfed in turmoil.

Just two years after demonstrators took to the streets demanding freedom and an end to the regime of Mubarak, it appears Egyptians are no better off now than they were back then.

A continued threat to the Israeli people stems from smugglers and extremists bringing everything from drugs and weapons through the Sinai.

The Egyptian government continues to let the Sinai be used as a sanctuary for illicit activities and provides Iran the pathway to provide weapons to re-arm Hamas.

The threat is more apparent by Ahmadinejad arriving in Cairo today, marking the first time an Iranian leader has visited Egypt since 1979.

The existential threat that a nuclear Iran poses to Israel, to our U.S. allies, and national security interests seeks to destabilize the region.

As recent reports suggest that Iran has told UN nuclear officials that it plans to add hundreds more centrifuges to further its nuclear enrichment program.

Vice-President Biden’s recent comments about the Administration’s willingness to talk to the Supreme Leader will only embolden the Iranian regime.

Instead, we must concentrate on enforcing and expanding our sanctions and cooperate with responsible nations to compel Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons ambitions.

And if all of that wasn’t enough, we are witnessing Abu Mazen and Hamas seeking to ‘unify’ their mutual hatred towards the democratic state of Israel.

These overtures can leave the future of the peace process in serious jeopardy.

The Palestinian Authority is corrupt and has not prevented Hamas and other Palestinian extremist groups from allowing violence to turn against the Jewish State.

Congress needs to exert our oversight responsibility and urge the Obama administration to hold the Palestinian Authority accountable for its aggressive actions against our ally Israel.

The destructive actions by the Palestinian Authority at the UN, negotiating with Hamas, and undermining the peace process with Israel cannot continue without any repercussions.

As the former Chairman of our Foreign Affairs Committee, I exercised due diligence by holding funds from reaching the Palestinian Authority.

We should also leverage our contributions to the United Nations, specifically entities like UNESCO from preventing the PA from pushing its anti-Israel agenda.

I am disappointed that the Administration continues to advocate for millions of taxpayer dollars for Palestinian programs and ignores existing U.S. law which already prohibits funds to entities that recognize 'Palestine' at the UN.

Should the U.S. be sending millions in hard-earned U.S. taxpayer dollars to the Palestinian Authority when they continue to embrace extremist violence against the Israeli people?"

It has become clear that Abu Mazen is more interested in joining forces with Hamas, a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organization, than he is with brokering peace with Israel.

This is the same entity that was viciously attacking Israel with a persistent and ongoing barrage of rocket attacks from Gaza.

They have all been clear signals that Israel cannot count Abu Mazen as a true "partner in peace."

While he actively seeks to reconcile with Hamas, he shows where his true priorities lie, undermining the peace process.

I agree with Prime Minister Netanyahu that Israel cannot negotiate with a partner who openly embraces a foreign terrorist organization that wishes to see the destruction of the Jewish State of Israel.

Israel cannot find a true partner in peace with any government that is comprised of members of Hamas.

If these efforts of unification are real, it gives us all a great deal of reason for concern for both the future of the peace process, and indeed, Israel's safety in the rapidly changing Middle East.