

**Occasional Papers**

**A View from the Inside:  
Congressional Decisionmaking and Arab-  
Israeli Policy**

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## A View from the Inside: Congressional Decisionmaking and Middle East Policy

In the post-Vietnam era, the nature of American politics and the congressional role in foreign policy have been greatly altered. The role of media, money, lobbyists, political parties, the White House, and Congress—as an institution and as individual members—have collectively established a system that allows special interests to shape the narratives of key foreign policy issues and, in turn, manipulate the manner in which Congress asserts itself. The reaction of the 107th Congress to the second Palestinian intifada, which began in September 2000, is a case in point: Congress selectively viewed the conflict through the lens offered by others. The reaction of Congress has little to do with deep-seated bias toward Israel or instinctive hostility toward Palestinians. Rather, for its own reasons—including self-serving political calculations—Congress sided with Israel.

As a congressional staff member during this period, I was privy to inside information—letters to and from members of Congress, “Dear Colleague” internal memos, letters from the administration and foreign governments, letters from interest groups pertaining to Middle East policy—and witnessed or participated in numerous conversations and debates about the Middle East. My first-hand source material and experience gave me a unique perspective on the often misunderstood process of congressional decisionmaking.

### CONGRESSIONAL DECISIONMAKING AND FOREIGN POLICY

Because Congress is a diffuse institution—with power in both the House and Senate divided along partisan, sectional, economic, and ideological lines—individual members, regardless of expertise and committee assignment, can play an active role in the foreign policy process. However, each congressional chamber is organized by committees, with the House International Relations/Senate Foreign Affairs Committees have primary responsibility over foreign policy. The former hold hearings, send legislation to the House floor, and influence policy not so much by their power, but by their ability—through the media and otherwise—to frame issues and pressure the executive branch.<sup>1</sup> However, the Appropriations Committee, which funds all domestic and foreign programs, exerts greater control by directly overseeing the congressional power of the purse.

Watergate triggered a wave of reform in federal government. Led by a large freshman class of legislators in 1974, the House passed reforms that limited the power of committee chairmen, increased the number of subcommittees, and expanded staff size. Congress also strengthened its own ability to conduct oversight and research on domestic and foreign issues. Simultaneously, the nature of the media changed, allowing individual members to champion foreign policy causes over the airwaves. Collectively, the reforms disbursed power and gave the average member a greater ability to play a prominent role in any debate, regardless of committee assignments.

Partisanship has had a growing influence on foreign policy decisions since Vietnam. On foreign policy issues, the goal of the leadership is to create wedge issues that offer electoral benefits to the majority of party members. Party leaders also set the congressional calendar, deciding which issues reach the floor for votes and the rules under which a specific piece of legislation is debated. Manipulating procedure to force votes on key issues is com-

mon, especially if the vote serves the interest of a strong domestic interest group.

Since the 1994 congressional elections, Republicans have narrowly maintained control of the House and, with the exception of 2001–2002, the Senate. Because the margins are narrow, however, Republicans have fought a continual battle to gain a comfortable edge, whereas Democrats have worked to regain majorities. This has made foreign policy, traditionally more nonpartisan than other issues, subject to intense partisan calculations. In the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, Tom Delay of Texas—who served as Majority Whip and later as Majority Leader—was especially influential between 1995 and 2006, when he resigned in the midst of scandal.

## Elections and Foreign Policy

In *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, David Mayhew contends that electoral considerations are the primary factor in all congressional actions. The goal is to score political points and avoid pitfalls.<sup>2</sup> Members are elected to represent specific congressional districts, and their most important job is serving local interests. Members also work to build coalitions that ease reelection, which explains why a member from blue-collar Pittsburgh is more likely to support positions of labor unions, or why a member from heavily Arab metro Detroit would be sympathetic to Palestinian sentiments. Congress responds to numbers, as well as to active and organized individuals, which explains the power of lobbies with grassroots networks.

How members view their jobs and constituents determines their legislative approach, including how they vote on issues or which issues they champion. The safer the seat, the more willing a member is to adopt a delegate approach.<sup>3</sup> As delegates, members believe that voters endorse their personal platforms. Members from marginal seats use a district-oriented approach, where they believe they are elected to reflect the views of the district. On the basis of their perceptions of their primary constituency (those who provide votes, money, and organizational assistance), members try to manage two simultaneous and distinct careers: one in Washington and one at home.<sup>4</sup>

Delegates are inclined to engage in nonlocalized issues, including foreign policy. In many marginal districts, however, activity on foreign policy is nongermane to electoral needs and may even be harmful. For example, Rep. Phil Crane (R-Illinois), who was first elected in 1968 and had held his seat until 2004, was defeated that year in part because his opponent, Melissa Bean, accused him of spending too much time abroad. To highlight this fact, the Democratic National Committee, in coordination with Bean, sent his constituents “Wish you were here” postcards from all the places Crane had visited as chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade. He was unable to convince his constituents that his foreign travels served their interests.

Interest groups work at the national level but often rely on strong grassroots networks. At the grassroots level, the goal of any interest group is to motivate its members, thereby creating an active voting bloc. On average, only 1/3 of eligible voters participate in mid-term elections. Candidates are most responsive to those who vote, and dedicated voters often have ties to interest groups (Jacobson 1992, 105). This explains why a member representing sizable Jewish communities in New York, such as Rep. Joe Crowley of Queens, strongly supports Israeli causes or why, with a substantial Armenian-American population

in his district, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-California) supports Armenia.

Ideology is another reason for congressional activism on foreign policy. Each member of the House and Senate campaigned on a platform that was endorsed by his or her electorate. A conservative Republican who made abortion a major theme of his campaign will be active on abortion issues. Pro-Israel candidates will remain pro-Israel once elected.

## **Lobbies and Special Interest Groups**

The number of lobbyists has increased dramatically since the 1970's, and so has their ability to communicate with members of Congress and their constituents. Special interest groups attempt to shape the terms of debate with government officials and the media, provide campaign assistance, promote or oppose legislative and executive branch initiatives, and localize issues by developing grassroots networks.

Candidates were once heavily dependent on the national parties for fundraising. But post-Watergate campaign finance reforms created the modern political action committee (PAC) system. PACs are organized by special interest groups to provide campaign contributions to sympathetic candidates. As the number of PACs grew, party influence over the political process diminished.

In Washington, four types of lobbyists are active on foreign policy: (a) domestic-based ethnic lobbies, (b) representatives of foreign governments, (c) business and trade associations, and (d) issue-based lobbies. Depending on the issue, each type can be powerful, but success is determined by a number of factors, including organizational strength, grassroots support, financial resources, creativity and resonance of message, and ability to win allies and quell the opposition.

In the 1980s the American automobile industry was ailing, and the pressure to impose tariffs on Japanese automobiles forced the Japanese to invest in lobbying activities. Japan hired 110 former government officials to lobby on its behalf and poured massive amounts of money into pro-trade think tanks. In 1989 alone, Japan allocated \$250 million for research.<sup>5</sup>

Many members of Congress have become tied to specific ethnic or country groups. Dan Burton of Indiana is a close ally of Pakistan, earning him the nickname "Pakistani Danny." Former Representative Helen Bentley was pro-Serb. Both Burton and Bentley were rewarded by nationwide campaign contributions from Pakistani and Serbian-Americans. Frequently, members grandstand or force votes on nonlegally binding resolutions simply to send a message to appease special interest groups.

Two ethnic-based lobbies have recently risen to prominence and illustrate the conditions under which a lobby can emerge and shape debate. Armenian-Americans (who are concentrated in New York, New Jersey, Michigan, and California) lacked a serious political voice until the breakdown of the Soviet Union, when Armenia's importance and the size of the ex-patriot community increased.<sup>6</sup> Armenian leaders organized nationally and worked with their congressional representatives to establish an Armenian Caucus. When Rep. James Rogan (R-California) opposed a key Caucus initiative, the large and active Armenian community he represented retaliated by pouring money into the coffers of his opponent. Rogan's defeat put Armenia firmly on the political map.

The Kosovo Caucus, on the other hand, was created hastily as the Balkans descended into bloody chaos in the late 1990s. After Kosovo became the issue *du jure*, American-based ethnic Kosovars quickly worked to establish a caucus and Washington-based lobby, which served up ample press releases and reports to Congress. These activities helped to sway Congress to support President Clinton's decision to bomb Serbia in 1999.

While both Israel and the Arab world have special interest groups that advocate on their behalf, Arab lobbies have had a much more difficult time influencing the system, for both domestic and international reasons. Domestically, the very definition of "Arab-American" has been subject of considerable debate. In the 1990 census, it was estimated that nearly 80 percent of Arab-Americans were Christians, many of whom immigrated to the United States around 1900.<sup>7</sup> Christian Arabs have traditionally organized along secular lines, supporting organizations such as the National Association of Arab-Americans, the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, and the Arab-American Institute. Collectively, these groups have struggled over their primary mission: defending civil rights within the United States or promoting Arab causes abroad. Recent Arab-American immigration has been overwhelmingly composed of Muslims, changing the balance of the community and altering the issues deemed to have priority.

The differing agendas of Arab nations and factions within these nations have caused divisions within the Arab-American community. Maronite Christians have often been at odds with other Lebanese, just as American Copts have clashed with other Egyptians. More recently, the US invasion of Iraq created splits within the Arab community, as many Iraqis who loathed Saddam Hussein openly supported the invasion.

The Arab lobby is buttressed by the business community. During the 1981 debate over arms sales to Saudi Arabia, Mobile Oil, Boeing, and United Technologies allocated vast sums of money in support of the Reagan administration. Boeing and United Technologies alone spent \$100 million in support of the arms sale.<sup>8</sup> ARAMCO established a public relations office in Washington in 1973, and groups such as the American Business Group of Jeddah and the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt have been part of the US political scene for decades.

During the Truman administration the pro-Israel lobby established a formal presence in Washington, which in time became what today is the American Israel Political Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Lobbying efforts quickly bore fruit, with Israel securing \$65 million in economic assistance to Israel in 1951 and \$73 million a year later.<sup>9</sup> By 1991, the organization had a budget of \$15 million, 150 staff members, and thirteen offices including the national headquarters.<sup>10</sup>

"Shrewd interest groups learned to combine their work in Washington with work at the grass roots," noted Gary Jacobson, a political scientist and elections specialist at the University of California at San Diego.<sup>11</sup> AIPAC has long understood this rule and relied heavily on its grassroots connections. Its highly organized grassroots network was greatly improved when AIPAC established regional offices, the first of which was opened in 1983. Its grassroots network is continually bolstered by aggressive membership drives. AIPAC members not only focus on the issues of concern to Israel, but they also vote. Jewish-Americans comprise only 4 percent of the American population, but 89 percent live in twelve states—including swing states such as Florida.<sup>12</sup>

AIPAC also recognizes the value of campaign contributions. AIPAC's allies con-



tribute vastly more campaign funds to federal, state, and local candidates than any other foreign-oriented lobby. OpenSecrets.org, the Web site of the Center for Responsive Politics (a nonpartisan group that tracks who gives how much money to which candidates and what effect such giving has on public policy), estimates that pro-Israel groups contributed \$41.3 million to various campaign between 1989 and 2002. During the same time period, pro-Arab groups donated \$297,000 to candidates and parties. Pro-Israel groups are unique in that they frequently provide seed money to candidates at early stages of their campaigns or, in some cases, when they run for local or state offices.

Other organizations also work on behalf of Israeli interests. To the right of AIPAC, the Zionist Organization of America, long opposed to the Oslo peace process, supports hard-line policies toward the Palestinians. B'nai Brith is essentially a civil rights organization, but it still engages on foreign policy issues, usually toeing a line close to AIPAC. To the left, Americans for Peace Now takes a more moderate stance on issues, believing that "there is more than one way to support Israel." It opposes settlements in the West Bank and Gaza and strongly supports working with the Palestinian Authority and Arab governments to broker a lasting peace agreement. Further to the left, Jews for Peace in Palestine and Israel has emerged as a dissenting and often lonely voice.

### **Modern American Middle East Policy**

Richard Nixon viewed the globe through a cold war prism, seeing the Soviet Union and United States engaged in an epic global battle often waged by proxies. Nixon viewed the Arab-Israeli conflict essentially as an ideological outgrowth of the cold war in which Israel was allied with the United States while Egypt served as Soviet surrogate. Israel worked doggedly to curry favor with Nixon, supporting Nixon's Vietnam policy and intervening in the 1970 crisis in Jordan ("Black September"). Nixon returned the favor and benefited domestically by his strong ties to Tel Aviv. In the early 1970s, an estimated 30 percent of US campaign contributions were of Jewish origin, and Nixon was duly rewarded for his support of Israel.<sup>13</sup>

Adjusting to the changing political landscape in the 1970s, AIPAC replaced its head, Si Kenen, with a much more aggressive leader, Morris Amitay. With new campaign finance laws in place allowing PAC donations, AIPAC quickly established a number of PACs to reward and punish members of Congress. AIPAC's carrot and stick approach proved immediately successful; the organization succeeded in its 1974 lobbying campaign to boost Israel's aid package from \$404 million to \$2.2 billion.<sup>14</sup>

Using the stick has since proved effective at silencing Israel's congressional critics. "Every few years the Jewish lobby 'eliminates' an American politician who does not support the Israeli government unconditionally. This is not done secretly, behind closed doors, but as a public 'execution,'" noted Uri Avnery, a long-time Israeli peace activist.<sup>15</sup>

Gerald Ford relied heavily on Henry Kissinger to manage the Middle East. A settlement was needed not only for the sake of peace, but also because the 1973 oil boycott badly damaged the US economy and made visible US dependency on the region's resources. Ford suggested that the United States might "reassess" its position in the region, and Kissinger worked to formulate a peace plan. When the plan became known, Israel opposed it because it called for a return of Arab lands captured in the 1967 war. AIPAC quickly worked Con-

gress, and a letter signed by seventy-six senators was sent to Ford opposing the plan.<sup>16</sup> Ford's attempt to provide arms to Arab governments was opposed by AIPAC and its allies on the Hill. The proposed shipment of ground-to-air missiles to Saudi Arabia was reduced from fifteen hundred to six hundred and fifty.<sup>17</sup>

As a presidential candidate, Jimmy Carter declared that it was "a moral imperative" that the United States continue to support Israel; he won 70 percent of the Jewish vote in the 1976 election.<sup>18</sup> In office, however, he had an acrimonious relationship with the pro-Israel lobby. In 1977, Carter declared that Anwar Sadat gave Egypt "a moral claim to US aid" and in a speech spoke of establishing a "Palestinian homeland."<sup>19</sup> In response, AIPAC-allied members of Congress sent Carter a detailed twenty-one-point letter outlining their dismay at his Middle East positions. Allegations that the Carter administration was pro-Arab were seemingly supported when the US ambassador to the United Nations was forced to resign after meeting (in violation of US law) with representatives of the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Carter's decision to sell F-15 fighters to Saudi Arabia in 1978 generated fierce opposition in Congress, attributable in large part to AIPAC's lobbying. Some senators who backed the deal, including Senator George McGovern (D-South Dakota), were opposed by AIPAC during their reelection bids. In his own unsuccessful bid for reelection, Carter received only 45 percent of the Jewish vote.<sup>20</sup>

Ronald Reagan quickly ran into problems with AIPAC over arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Given the Iranian threat, the decision to sell additional F-15's and Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) to Saudi Arabia made sense from a policy standpoint. But the Kingdom's hostility toward Israel made the deal politically costly. Reagan narrowly won approval (52-48) for the deal on the Senate floor, but only after applying heavy pressure—including offers of carrots and sticks—to wavering senators.

While losing the AWACS battle, AIPAC may have won the war.<sup>21</sup> Reagan's ability to move Middle East-related legislation through Congress fizzled. Congress blocked a 1985 arms deal with Jordan. This, despite the fact that at the time Jordan's King Hussein, at the request of the Reagan administration, was engaged in secret negotiations aimed at initiating dialog with the Palestinians. The same year, Reagan was forced to withdraw a Saudi arms package; a different Saudi arms deal was rejected by the Senate (77-22) a year later. Meanwhile, Israel's aid package changed from \$2.1 billion in loans in 1980 to \$3.8 billion in grants in 1986.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1980s, the pro-Israel lobby began to aggressively broaden its coalition by building ties with evangelical Christian groups, shaping debate in the academic world, and prominently injecting itself in political campaigns. AIPAC hired a liaison to religious conservatives in the early 1980s and formed strong relations with Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and other evangelical luminaries. Especially since the Clinton-Benjamin Netanyahu years, the Zionist-Christian Right alliance has allowed Republicans to compete with Democrats for Jewish votes and campaign contributions.

At the congressional campaign level, Senator Charles Percy (R-Illinois) was punished for criticizing Israeli policies pertaining to the Palestinians and the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. He was the target of a \$1 million negative advertisement campaign funded by Michael Golad, a wealthy Californian. Percy's primary opponent, Representative Tom Corcoran, received \$285,000 from Jewish PACs, while his opponent in the general election,

Paul Simon, received \$3 million in pro-Israel money.<sup>23</sup> Tom Harkin was endorsed in the Iowa Senate race over incumbent Roger Jepsen, who famously switched his vote on the Saudi AWACS sale. In the 1980s it became clear that pro-Israel organizations offered either carrots or sticks to candidates, and it did not hesitate to use the stick. As former Senator Charles Mathias (R-Maryland) noted, “as a result of the activities of the [Israeli] lobby, Congressional conviction has been measurably reinforced by the knowledge that political sanctions will be applied [to] any who fail to deliver.”<sup>24</sup>

Critics of the pro-Israel lobby attribute former President George H. W. Bush’s political tailspin to his insistence on brokering a Middle East peace deal that Israel opposed. Faced with Yitzak Shamir’s inflexibility, Bush threatened to freeze a lucrative \$10 billion loan guarantee to Israel. Bush’s position on the loan made him the target of considerable criticism from Israel’s congressional allies. The President received an AIPAC-drafted letter signed by 240 members of the House and seventy-seven senators opposing his decision on the loan guarantee. When AIPAC organized a Hill lobbying day, Bush complained, “1000 Jewish lobbyists are on Capitol Hill against little old me.”<sup>25</sup> His Jewish support is estimated to have dropped from 38 percent in 1988 to 8–13 percent in 1992.<sup>26</sup>

## The 107th CONGRESS AND THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

On September 28, 2000, a few hours before the US House of Representative passed H.R. 5272 (the Peace Through Negotiations Act of 2000), Ariel Sharon and 1,000 Israeli police officers marched through Haram al-Sharif with the goal of bolstering Sharon’s conservative credentials at the expense of his Likud Party rival Benjamin Netanyahu. Ensuing demonstrations, and the police reaction to them, left four dead and 200 injured. In wake of the failed Camp David negotiations, Congress passed H.R. 5272, symbolic legislation intended to warn Yasser Arafat of the consequences of unilaterally declaring a Palestinian state. Should the Palestinian Authority declare statehood, the bill required the United States to cut assistance, downgrade diplomatic relations with the Palestinian Authority, close the Palestinians’ Washington office, and withhold payments to international organizations that recognize the new Palestinian state.

H.R. 5272’s findings did not mention the reason that Arafat had threatened to unilaterally declare statehood. The Oslo agreement had three core components: (a) negotiations would be for a limited duration, (b) neither side would take provocative steps while negotiations were underway, and (c) the final settlement would be based on United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338. The bill made no mention that the negotiations, which had recently broken down during a hasty summit convened by President Clinton at Camp David, had already dragged on for seven years.

Nor did it suggest that unilateral Israeli actions, mainly settlement construction, violated the spirit if not letter of Oslo. During the Oslo period, Israel’s settlement population in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza doubled to 400,000.<sup>27</sup> Every president from Johnson to Clinton firmly opposed settlement. “The United States policy on settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories is unchanged and is clear. And that is: We oppose new settlements in territories beyond the 1967 lines—the stated, reaffirmed policy

over and over again,” asserted President George H. W. Bush.<sup>28</sup>

The floor debate over H.R. 5272, a bill sponsored by House International Relations Chairman Benjamin Gilman (R-New York), was flat; only a handful of proponents of the bill weighed in. The common theme among speakers was that Israel was fully committed to the peace process, having worked with President Clinton and abided by the Oslo agreement. Below the surface, members warned Arafat that should the peace process collapse—as it did spectacularly that very day—Congress would hold him responsible.

“If Chairman Arafat rejects the fundamental precept of Oslo, if he chooses to squander this historic opportunity for peace, the United States’ response will be swift and unequivocal,” commented Rep. Nita Lowey (D-New York).<sup>29</sup> Observed Rep. Elliot Engel (D-New York), “After months of serious negotiations in which Israel demonstrated a willingness to compromise on all issues . . . Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian negotiators were ultimately unwilling to make the compromises needed to reach a peace accord.”<sup>30</sup> “We must make clear that, if the Palestinian Authority unilaterally acts to destroy any prospect of a peace agreement and to make war and violence, very likely there will be severe consequences,” Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-New York) grimly remarked.<sup>31</sup> The final vote on H.R. 5272 was overwhelming, 385-27, with four members toeing a neutral line and voting “present.”

Less than a month later, the House of Representatives passed H.Con.Res. 426, a nonbinding resolution that expressed “solidarity with the state and people of Israel” and condemned “the Palestinian leadership for encouraging the violence.” It also urged the Clinton administration to block any “unbalanced” United Nations Security Council resolutions pertaining to the intifada.<sup>32</sup> Again, the vote was lopsided, 365-30, with 11 members voting “present.” Of the 30 who voted against it, five were retiring at the end of the session, nine were Republican, twelve were African-American, and one—Democrat Nick Rahall of West Virginia—was Arab-American. Of the six Arab-American members, one voted in favor, one voted against, two voted “present,” and two did not vote. Four members who opposed the measure were from Michigan, a state rich in Arab-American voters.

As the 106th Congress drew to a close, the intifada raged on. Desperate attempts by the Clinton administration to broker a cease-fire and clinch an illusive peace deal failed. From the Arab perspective, ominous political signs were emerging. Hoping that a Bush administration would be “more balanced” in the way it approached the peace process, an overwhelming majority of Arab-American voters backed George W. Bush during the election. They believed that the son’s views on the Middle East mirrored those of his father, the president who had launched the Madrid Conference in the wake of Operation Desert Storm.

Few really knew where George W. Bush really stood on Israeli-Palestinian issues. In a speech to AIPAC in 1999, candidate Bush stressed his strong support for Israel. “As soon as I take office, I will begin the process of moving the US ambassador to the city Israel has chosen as its capital,” declared Bush, indicating his apparent support for reversing long-standing policy by moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.<sup>33</sup>

In the 107th Congress, encouraging actions like the 1999 Rahall-initiated letter signed by twenty-eight members, Jews and Arab-Americans alike, in support of investment in Bethlehem 2000 would be few and far between; Bethlehem 2000 itself was an early casualty of the intifada. The 107th Congress would repeatedly demonstrate its unswerving support for Israel and its policies, while rebuking Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority.

US relations with other countries, namely Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, were also affected by the intifada, particularly within the halls of Congress. During the cold war, Jordan went to great lengths to avoid falling victim to pan-Arabism or other periodic threats, such as from the Palestinian Liberation Organization in 1970. Jordan suffered greatly in the court of public opinion for siding with Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War, but Jordan's peace agreement with Israel made its public relations comeback complete. Jordan and the United States were on the verge of finalizing a free trade agreement when the second intifada broke out in 2000. By keeping quiet and minimizing conflicts with Israel, his Arab neighbors, and the United States, King Abdullah II managed to maintain strong ties with Congress and the White House.

It was a different story for the Saudis and Egyptians. In the past, Saudi Arabia was something of a teflon ally to the United States. Saudi Arabia was criticized for its position toward Israel, its human rights record, and other issues, but the alliance was not seriously questioned because Saudi oil was vital to the US economy. Congress, in defiance of AIPAC, repeatedly approved selling arms to the Kingdom. Senator Joe Lieberman (D-Connecticut), an observant Orthodox Jew, has bucked AIPAC in the past by approving arms sales to Saudi Arabia. But the second intifada, the peace plan of Saudi Crown Prince (now King) Abdullah, and Israel's reaction to it, opened the Kingdom to criticism. The most damaging issue in 2001, however, was the fact that fifteen of the nineteen September 11 hijackers were Saudi citizens. The Kingdom's initial unsatisfactory response to the threat posed by al-Qaeda, replete with denial, severely harmed the Saudi image in Congress.

On the surface, Egypt's relationship with the United States is a strong one. Since the late 1970s, Egypt has been America's second largest recipient of foreign aid, to the tune of a staggering \$59.9 billion dollars.<sup>34</sup> US-Egyptian cooperation on the political, economic, and military levels has been extensive. Egypt has served as a conduit for the United States to protect its interests in the Middle East. At the same time, however, Egypt's bilateral relationship with the United States is tied to its bilateral relationship with Israel. Egypt became a strong US ally only after President Sadat made peace with the Jewish state. Or, as stated in a July 2000 letter signed by twenty-six Senators to President Clinton, "As you know, Egypt, one of America's most important allies in the Middle East, was the first Arab nation to reach a peace treaty with Israel, and continues to play a key role in the Middle East peace process."<sup>35</sup> The letter was in support of a free trade agreement, but it was Egypt's ties to Israel that were highlighted in the opening paragraph.

In the past twenty-five years, US-Egyptian relations have often cooled when Egypt's relations with Israel have cooled. Typically during these periods, Egypt has been subjected to intense congressional criticism on issues nongermane to Israel, such as Egypt's spotty human rights record, its treatment of the Coptic-Christian community, alleged anti-Semitism in its media, and a questionable commitment to democracy.

Within two months of the start of the intifada, Egypt's critics in Congress spoke up. On November 30, Senators Jesse Helms and Sam Brownback (R-Kansas) sent a scathing letter to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, strongly censuring Egypt and threatening its assistance package, for its response to the breakdown of the peace process. It read in part:

Since the very beginning of the turmoil between Israel and the Palestinians, Egypt has played an obviously pernicious role—agitating Arab states

to launch action against Israel, coordinating the Arab League's concerted attack on Israel. ... In wake of a disgraceful attack by Palestinian terrorists against a school bus packed with Jewish children (and subsequent Israeli retaliation against Palestinian military sites) the government of Egypt recalled its ambassador to Israel. Such moves serve only to encourage terrorists—whose goal is to end the peace process and ultimately, to eliminate the state of Israel.<sup>36</sup>

Egypt was outraged. "I have to admit [sic] being truly puzzled that such a letter would carry your signature," wrote Egyptian ambassador Nabil Fahmy in a letter to Helms. "Egypt has attempted to end the crisis and bring the parties back to the negotiating table. ... Egypt's decision to recall its ambassador in Israel for consultation after Israel targeted Palestinian political institutions was in response to the increasingly grave situation in the Palestinian occupied territories."<sup>37</sup> Egypt's position was buttressed by the Clinton White House. Egypt, in fact, had been aggressively trying to cobble together a cease-fire, and it hosted a peace summit in October. "I especially want to thank President Mubarak for Egypt's consistent and pivotal partnership in the peace process and for playing a critical role in our efforts here," remarked President Clinton after the Sharm el-Sheikh summit.<sup>38</sup>

### January-April 2001

In the waning days of the Clinton administration, hope—fueled by continuous dialog and the Taba talks—still remained that the immediate conflict could be resolved, and perhaps even a peace agreement brokered. However, in the early months of the Bush administration, little effort was exerted either to quell the violence or to facilitate a return to the negotiating table. As frustration mounted in the Arab world, and in the absence of a clear administration policy, Congress impatiently watched developments.

The first congressional action was initiated on February 8, when H.R. 34 was introduced in the House by Representatives Henry Hyde (R-Illinois), Tom Lantos, Gilman (R-New York), and Eric Cantor (R-Virginia), the latter two being the only Jewish Republicans in the House; it passed five days later by a vote of 410-1. H.R. 34 congratulated Israel on its election and Ariel Sharon on his victory.

Sharon is an infamous figure, having been implicated repeatedly for using excessive force against Palestinians, Lebanese, Jordanians, and Egyptians since the founding of Israel in 1948. In 1982, Sharon was forced to resign as defense minister after an Israeli inquiry found him responsible for the atrocities committed by Israeli-allied Lebanese militias at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Almost twenty years later, Sharon's actions on September 28 touched off rioting that sparked the second intifada.

The H.R. 34 debate is instructive, further demonstrating the congressional view that the intifada and the failure of Oslo were entirely the responsibility of Arafat and that Israel is only nation in the region that shares America's democratic values. "In over 50 years of Israel's existence, it has stood as a beacon of democracy.... While H. R. 34 urges Palestinian Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat to use his influence and resources to see that violence in the Middle East is brought to an end, the legislation also restates the US commitment to a secure peace for Israel," opined Hyde, chairman of the House Inter-

national Relations Committee.<sup>39</sup> “Ariel Sharon’s election sends a powerful message that we would be well-advised to heed: Yasir Arafat can’t be a negotiator for the ‘peace of the brave’ by day and a coordinator of cowardly terrorist acts by night,” added Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-New York), the ranking Democrat on the International Relations Committee Middle East Subcommittee.<sup>40</sup>

Others, such as Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-New York), were more forceful and arguably less diplomatic:

We have once again been reminded of a lesson about the nation of Israel: That she is alone in an ocean of monarchies and dictatorships .... The fact of the matter is that Yasser Arafat and his people have shown time and time again in recent months that they simply do not care about finding peace. They have shown no interest .... When there is a button for peace or a button for war, the Palestinians have pressed the one for war.<sup>41</sup>

Rep. Nadler (D-New York) added:

We must continue as we always have to respect the fact that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. As we have unfortunately witnessed, even when offered 95 percent of their stated goals, a Palestinian state, 100 percent of Gaza, and 95 percent of the West Bank, including even sovereignty over sites holy to Judaism as well as to Islam, the Palestinians responded with violence, refusing even to make a counteroffer; violence that continues to this day.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Senate, Diane Feinstein (D-California) also attacked Arafat:

Prime Minister Barak went further than any other Israeli Prime Minister in an attempt to reach a comprehensive agreement with the Palestinians which includes: The creation of a Palestinian state; Palestinian control of all of Gaza; Palestinian control of approximately 94 to 95 percent of the West Bank ... Not only was the Palestinian response to these unprecedented offers “no,” but, even as Prime Minister Barak attempted to engage Chairman Yasser Arafat at the negotiation table, the Palestinians took to a campaign of violence in the streets, and threatened to unilaterally declare an independent Palestinian state.<sup>43</sup>

Three separate bills were introduced in the early months of 2001 that aimed to move the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Reps. Tom Reynolds (R-New York) and Cantor sent out numerous Dear Colleague letters, and eventually thirty-four members cosponsored their legislation (H.R. 1643). In a May 2 Dear Colleague letter, the two noted that “Jerusalem has been the spiritual and cultural center of the Jewish people for the past 3000 years” and added: “of the nearly 200 nations with which the United States has diplomatic relations, Israel is the only country where we neither recognize its capital, nor have our embassy located in that city.”<sup>44</sup>

The US Embassy’s location was discussed during a March 20 White House joint press conference with Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon. When asked if he would move the embassy, as he promised during the campaign, Bush danced around the issue. “Well,

the status of Israel, I mean, the status of Jerusalem will be ultimately determined by the interested parties. During the campaign, I said we'll begin the process of moving our embassy to Jerusalem," stated Bush.<sup>45</sup> Late in 2002, however, President Bush signed a law that incorporated language similar to the three Jerusalem bills into law. However, he opted not to implement the provision.

In late February 2001, Colonel Jabril Rajoub, head of the West Bank Preventative Security Force, visited Washington to consult with the CIA. Rajoub's job entailed coordinating with Israeli intelligence and CIA officials on security matters. Given the deteriorating situation on the ground, Rajoub made arrangements to brief Hill staffers. The office of John Dingell (D-Michigan), the most senior member of the House of Representatives who also represents the largest Arab-American constituency in the United States, agreed to host the briefing. Though the meeting was intended to be off the record and private, word quickly spread to pro-Israeli organizations. The Zionist Organization of America issued a press release on February 21, entitled "Arafat Aide, Who Is Now Visiting DC, Personally Escorted Murderers to Safety."<sup>46</sup> The administration was urged to cancel meetings with Rajoub, and Dingell's office received angry phone calls urging cancellation of the briefing. Despite this, the meetings went forward.

In March, Rep. Weiner dropped H.R. 1087, the first bill aimed specifically at prohibiting US assistance to the Palestinian Authority, including programs, projects, and activities in the West Bank and Gaza. At the time of introduction, the Palestinian Authority did not receive funds from the US government; all US funding was for humanitarian and nongovernmental economic assistance.

The Arab-American Institute sponsored a Hill briefing on March 20, entitled "Ariel Sharon and the Middle East Peace Process." Advertised to members and staff in a Dear Colleague letter from Rep. Dingell, the event featured Arab-American Institute President James Zogby, Dr. Shibley Telhami of the University of Maryland, and Rob Malley, special assistant to President Clinton for Arab-Israeli affairs. Malley later became a lightning rod for pro-Israeli, pro-Sharon groups for challenging the idea that Arafat was the reason for failure at Camp David and declaring that the historic offer to Arafat "was not the dream offer it has been made out to be."<sup>47</sup>

Signed by the chairman and ranking members of both the full House International Relations Committee and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia (Reps. Hyde, Lantos, Gilman, and Ackerman), a Dear Colleague letter dated March 16 was sent to all House members, encouraging them to sign a letter to the President to urge him to "reassess relations with the Palestinians." A similar letter was circulated in the Senate. Signed by 189 House members and eighty-nine senators, the letters stressed that the Palestinians had rejected a final status proposal "extraordinary in the scope of its concession" and had instead decided to "embark on a deliberate campaign of violence against Israelis."<sup>48</sup> Backed by AIPAC, they also demanded that the President close the Washington office of the PLO and list the PLO as a terrorist organization. The letter asked the President to refrain from meeting with Yasser Arafat or inviting him to meet with officials in Washington. Arafat never met Bush, nor did he return again to Washington. He died in November 2004.

In response, Yaser Abed Rabbo of the PLO sent a letter to all signatories of the April letters to explain that Barak's Camp David Offer would not have created a contiguous Palestinian state, that it failed to address the right of return for refugees, and that it did



not include a viable solution in regard to Jerusalem. It noted Israeli shortcomings, such as its failure to halt settlement activity. “Your recommendation that United States-Palestinian relations be reassessed, and the suggestion that US-Palestinian contacts be reduced, if not eliminated, will not contribute to ending the violence and returning to negotiations,” concluded Abed Rabbo.<sup>49</sup>

“The combination of violence, economic turmoil, and diplomatic stalemate has generated anger and disillusionment in both the Israeli and Palestinian camps. These feelings will become further pronounced should the decision to reevaluate America’s role vis-à-vis the peace process be interpreted in the region as American apathy toward it,” warned Rep. Dingell in an April 19 letter to President Bush.<sup>50</sup> Dingell urged the President to engage his administration, and he vented his anger at an attack on Palestinian security officials moments after they left a meeting at the home of US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk.

President Bush was dogged by questions about US disengagement when he met with Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak on April 2. A visibly agitated president said in response to one question: “Well, we’re very engaged in the Middle East and will remain so . . . I understand that we can facilitate peace. We can’t force a peace . . . the United States will not set a timetable that meets our specific needs.”<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile, Egypt’s critics attacked Mubarak over alleged anti-Semitism in its press, which is partially subsidized by the state. In a somber statement, Senator Gordon Smith (R-Oregon), who noted Egypt’s importance to the peace process, stated:

The wrong that has been committed in Egypt on a daily basis is . . . anti-Semitism. I am not speaking of critiques of Israeli policy, but a resurgence of acerbic anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial. I am speaking of the coarsest sort of hatred of Jews as Jews, the kind of hatred that pollutes the mind, infects the soul and ensures that peace remains stone cold... what separates our experience from the terrible form of anti-Semitism that we see in Egypt today is that we denounce it from the secular and religious pulpits of our society.... Unfortunately, in Egypt the opposite seems to be the rule.<sup>52</sup>

Egypt quickly defended itself against Smith. “Egyptians are Semites themselves and therefore, by definition, they cannot be anti-Semitic . . . no Egyptian official has spoken, hinted, or acquiesced to any sort of hatred to Jews or any people of other faith,” wrote Ambassador Fahmy in an April 10 letter to Smith. He also noted that Egypt had little control over the press and that much of the material deemed anti-Semitic was actually criticism of Israeli policies.<sup>53</sup>

## **May-August 2001**

The biggest political development of the spring of 2001 was the publication of the Report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, better known as the Mitchell Commission. Led by former US Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, the Mitchell Commission urged the Palestinian Authority “to make a 100 percent effort to prevent terrorist operations and to punish perpetrators” and to “prevent gunmen from using Palestin-

ian populated areas to fire upon Israeli populated positions.”<sup>54</sup> The Israelis were asked to “lift closures, transfer to the [Palestinian Authority] all tax revenues owed, and permit Palestinians who had been employed in Israel to return to their jobs.”<sup>55</sup> Additionally, the report noted, “A cessation of Palestinian-Israeli violence will be particularly hard to sustain unless the [Government of Israel] freezes all settlement construction activity.”<sup>56</sup>

Officially all parties, including the United States, warmly received the Mitchell Report. “We believe that the Report provides a balanced assessment of the facts, and we fully support the immediate implementation of all the Committee’s recommendations as a comprehensive package,” said Yaser Abed Rabbo.<sup>57</sup> “Israel appreciates the efforts of the Committee and considers that its Report provides a constructive and positive attempt to break the cycle of violence and facilitate a resumption of direct bilateral negotiations for peace on the basis of reciprocity,” wrote Dan Naveh on behalf of Prime Minister Sharon.<sup>58</sup>

Unofficially, the Israeli acceptance was qualified. The report itself did not offer a clear sequence of events, and Israel indicated that it would comply with its responsibilities only after violence stopped, even if its compliance alone would reduce the likelihood of violence. Palestinians, on the other hand, countered that they had little incentive to protect Israel without Israel taking simultaneous steps to reduce the appeal of violence.

On May 7, Zionist Organization of America issued a press release blasting the Mitchell Report, which it concluded “clearly takes Yasser Arafat’s side,” a conclusion ostensibly based on the report’s finding that both sides were to blame for the violence. Mixed in with its criticism of the report was a defense of Sharon’s visit to Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.<sup>59</sup> AIPAC too stressed the sequence issue, which began with an “unconditional need to end violence”; it noted that there is “no link between ending the violence and the issue of settlements.”<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, the PLO and Palestinian Authority sent a letter to members of Congress urging their assistance in implementing the Mitchell Report recommendations. “The Report’s unique and fundamental contribution to reducing violence and restoring an atmosphere conducive to negotiations is the recognition of the link between Israeli settlement activity and Israeli security,” noted the letter.<sup>61</sup>

The settlement issue is often cited by Palestinians as an indication that Israel is interested only in dragging out negotiations while changing the facts on the ground. They believe that the point is proven by the housing subsidies and tax breaks an Israeli settler receives for moving into the occupied territories. Sharon’s post-Mitchell Report statements in 2001 did nothing to dispel this belief. “The other thing is that we are building. We are planning now to bring another one million Jews to Israel,” Sharon said in a November interview.<sup>62</sup>

Rep. Ackerman introduced H.R. 1795, the Middle East Peace Commitment Act of 2001 (MEPCA) on May 1, which called on the President to review the PLO’s record and to impose a variety of political sanctions, which would effectively silence the PLO in Washington. It also included provisions to cut all nonhumanitarian assistance to the West Bank and Gaza. “This ongoing tragedy, however, is not an accident or an uncontrollable cycle. In fact, it is the result of deliberate decisions by Palestinian leaders to use violence as a political tool. Our legislation provides an opportunity to hold the Palestinians accountable for these decisions,” declared a Dear Colleague letter sent by Ackerman, Lantos, and Gilman, one of many in support of MEPCA that would reach House offices during the remainder of

the 107th Congress.<sup>63</sup> Sen. Feinstein and Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) introduced a Senate version of MEPCA.

MEPCA was quickly deemed a legislative priority by AIPAC. Americans for Peace Now opposed it, but other Jewish groups on the ideological Right quickly followed AIPAC's lead. "The response of the Palestinian Authority to compromises offered at the negotiating table by Israel last summer was to engage in a deliberate and orchestrated campaign of violence," noted the Orthodox Union in a letter sent to members of the House.<sup>64</sup> Hadassah, the women's branch of the Zionist Organization of America, wrote to Congress in support of the act, noting what it referred to as the "cynical resumption of violence by the Palestinians."<sup>65</sup>

Arab-American groups opposed H.R. 1795. "Beyond prohibiting virtually all US economic assistance to the Palestinian people, this harmful resolution would essentially sever all US-Palestinian diplomatic relations at a time when our role is most needed," noted the Arab American Institute.<sup>66</sup>

On May 8, 4-month-old Iman Hajo was killed when Israeli troops fired on a Gaza refugee camp; Prime Minister Sharon expressed condolences.<sup>67</sup> On June 1, twenty-one people were killed in a suicide bombing at a disco in Tel Aviv. In response to the attack, AIPAC's memo to Congress offered a partial list of the "more than 140 terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Palestinians since Israeli prime minister Sharon announced a unilateral ceasefire on May 22."<sup>68</sup> At least 128 Palestinians were killed between April 27 and June 27.<sup>69</sup>

Reps. Rob Andrews (D-New Jersey) and Jim Saxton (R-New Jersey) introduced legislation, strongly supported by the Zionist Organization of America, to establish an office in the Department of Justice devoted to monitoring Palestinian terrorism. A similar bill, S. 1377, was introduced by Sen. Gordon Smith.

"Among the many tragedies accompanying the break-down in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians has been the participation of Palestinian children in organized acts of violence . . . they were brought as a part of the Palestinian policy to recruit the most vulnerable members of society to become martyrs for the Intifada," wrote Reps. Engel and Cantor in a July 16 Dear Colleague letter touting their resolution urging the Palestinian Authority to stop the use of child soldiers.<sup>70</sup> Copies of the Dear Colleague letter were circulated throughout July.

Two days later, Reps. Curt Weldon (R-Pennsylvania) and Walter Jones (R-North Carolina) circulated a Dear Colleague letter in support of the joint US-Israeli program to develop the Arrow missile defense system. "The cooperation between the US and Israel is enabling missile technology to progress rapidly," their letter noted.<sup>71</sup>

Sandwiched between these two Dear Colleague letters, Mahmoud Abbas of the PLO sent a letter to members on July 17 to give a Palestinian perspective on events that had occurred the preceding year at Camp David. A *New York Times* op-ed article that contradicted the official Israeli version of the Taba talks, written by Rob Malley, was attached to the letter.<sup>72</sup>

The House debated the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, which passed by a wide margin, on July 19. Section 563 of the legislation included language and policy unfavorable to the Palestinians, albeit with a presidential national security waiver. Congress commonly uses national security waivers to demonstrate its positions on policies it knows have little chance of being implemented by the executive branch.

In his remarks in support of the bill, Dingell took the opportunity to introduce H.R. 205. The measure urged both parties to “fully commit themselves to end hostilities and work toward a permanent peace agreement” and, in absence of that, for the United Nations to take actions to end the conflict, “including, if necessary, the use of United Nations peacekeeping forces.”<sup>73</sup> “I urge my colleagues to oppose one-sided policies that help no one but harm everyone, including Israel. I urge them instead to join me as a cosponsor of a constructive piece of legislation that, if passed, will demonstrate that America is a fair arbiter of peace who is more interested in ending this deep, bitter conflict rather than sustaining it,” commented Dingell, who offered the measure to stimulate discussion.<sup>74</sup>

Secretary Powell had flirted with the idea of international monitors, but by the summer the United States was on record as being strongly opposed to the idea. In fact, the United States blocked a United Nations resolution calling for a monitoring mechanism, angering the Palestinians. “In a situation where one party has the power, military might, and US support against a group of people who are defenseless. . . . we are looking for the international community to support the Palestinians with monitors and observers who would report to decisionmakers, including the United States, to take the necessary decisions to protect our hopes, lives, property, land, and people,” said Marwan Kanafani, a spokesman for Arafat.<sup>75</sup>

On the same day that Dingell introduced his legislation, Rep. Cantor introduced H.R. 2566, a bill prohibiting assistance to the Palestinian Authority unless the President certified it was not excavating on the Temple Mount. “Stop Taxpayer Support For the Palestinian Talibanism of the Temple Mount,” declared a Dear Colleague letter sent by Cantor.<sup>76</sup>

On July 9, Republican Senator John Kyl of Arizona, a staunch supporter of Israel, launched into a lengthy attack on Arafat, the Oslo process, and Secretary of State Powell, who was working with both parties to accept a cease-fire. Kyl’s diatribe was indicative of the mood of many conservative Republican members of Congress, such as House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, who worked with Likud-allied pro-Israel groups and evangelical Christian organizations to champion Israel in Congress and the media.

Said Kyl:

Secretary Powell urged both parties to agree to a cease-fire, which temporarily they did, yet every single day there has been a bombing or other terrorist attack or attempt in the State of Israel. . . . The problem is that the 1993 Oslo accords, which were the genesis of this thing we call “the peace process,” we now learn were fundamentally flawed. . . . The Oslo process is dead. I am extremely concerned that the doctrine of moral equivalence has taken root among many in the United States and around the world with respect to perceptions of Arab-Israeli violence. While over the years Israel may have taken steps with which we do not always agree, the notion that it operates on the same moral plane as its adversaries is patently false . . . When the Israelis identify and eliminate the specific perpetrators of these mass terrorist killings, they are called murderers. Meanwhile, the world wrings its hands and asks why the parties can’t just return to the “peace process.”<sup>77</sup>

As anti-Palestinian sentiment boiled, threats were made to cut Egypt's aid package. Criticism centered on Egypt's \$1.3 billion annual military assistance package, partially triggered by a public debate in Israel. "A calm but dispute-ridden debate about Egypt's real intentions toward Israel is currently occupying Israel's intelligence community ... the focus is mainly on the issue of American arms supplied to Egypt ... the sale of arms to Egypt poses a danger to Israel," noted *Haaretz*.<sup>78</sup> Rep. Lantos toyed with the idea of introducing legislation but chose not to do so.

Egypt's allies on and off the Hill defended the US-Egyptian aid package, including military assistance. Ambassador Edward Walker, president of the Middle East Institute and former ambassador to both Cairo and Tel Aviv, penned an op-ed piece defending the package, which was promptly circulated on the Hill.<sup>79</sup> In October, Egypt hosted Bright Star, a massive military exercise in which ten nations participated, including the United States, which temporarily quieted the critics.<sup>80</sup>

Lantos did, however, carp on Egypt's human rights record, speaking out against its mistreatment of homosexuals in the wake of a May 10, 2001 raid during which fifty-two Egyptian men were arrested for "obscene behavior." An incensed Lantos declared:

Egyptian police arrested 52 Egyptian men because they frequented a gay night club. Since then, these men have been denied counsel, they have been tortured, they have had their reputations attacked, and they have been arraigned on trumped up charges. ... The Egyptian government's treatment of these 52 men is indicative of a broad pattern of persecution towards religious and secular dissidents. ... The US government and the governments of all countries should stand up and be counted against Egypt's growing record of intolerance and inhumanity.<sup>81</sup>

The mood of the Middle East was bleak in the summer of 2001. At an August 1 congressional briefing, "The Impact of the Al-Aqsa Intifada on US Relations With Key Arab Countries," numerous Arab diplomats voiced their concerns. Furthermore, the results of an Arab-American Institute poll, posted on the Institute's Web site on July 30, revealed, for example, that the Palestinian cause was the most important issue to 79 percent of Egyptians; it was among the top five issues for 95 percent of the respondents. The results from Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, the UAE, and Kuwait were similar.<sup>82</sup>

At the end of July, the Bush administration decided to downgrade its delegation to the United Nations Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Tolerance in protest over the attempts to debate a "Zionism is Racism" resolution. The decision angered the Congressional Black Caucus but was applauded by many of Israel's staunchest supporters in Congress. Rep. Lantos introduced H.R. 212 in support of the administration's position; it passed 408-3. Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Connecticut) introduced a Senate version.

Attached to an August 2 Dear Colleague letter from Reps. Lois Capps (D-California) and Amo Houghton (R-New York) was an opinion editorial written jointly by Yaser Abed Rabbo of the PLO and Yossi Beilin, a former Israeli cabinet member in the Ehud Barak government. It discussed a declaration in support of peace signed by fifty prominent Israeli and Palestinian political and cultural leaders. "We are heartened by the declaration

signed last week ... a solution clearly exists and can be nurtured into a comprehensive peace agreement,” noted Capps and Houghton.<sup>83</sup>

Momentum toward moderation and peace were abruptly halted on August 9, when a suicide bombing at a Jerusalem pizzeria killed fifteen and injured 130. The following day, Reps. Saxton and Engel introduced H.Con.R. 222, expressing strong support for Israel’s right to defend itself with force. “The fact remains, that Prime Minister Barak made many far-reaching concessions on a number of controversial issues such as the status of Jerusalem, water rights, refugee resettlement, settlements in the West Bank, and the creation of a future Palestinian State ... The result has been an escalation of violence with no end in sight,” wrote Saxton and Engel.<sup>84</sup>

The August congressional recess halted congressional activity. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Satterfield was sent on a high-profile visit to Jerusalem. Meanwhile, in the occupied Palestinian territories, sixty Palestinians were killed between July 28 and August 27, as reported by *The Palestinian Monitor*.<sup>85</sup> Coupled with an aggressive Israeli targeted assassination policy, massive Israeli incursions into the West Bank commenced in late August. In one incident, Israeli troops took up positions in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Reformation and Orphanage in Beit Jala, using the building to support its attacks on Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour. “We are now receiving reports that the Israeli army is shooting from the position on top of our building, injuring and killing people in the town, which of course endangers the life of our children,” pleaded Bishop Munib Younan.<sup>86</sup>

Momentum to dispatch international monitors to the occupied Palestinian territories grew within the United Nations. However, to the dismay of the Palestinians, the United States vetoed the Security Council resolution on the matter at the urging of Israel. “They would create a shield so that the Palestinians can continue operating behind it and make it impossible for Israel to respond,” commented Israeli spokesman Ra’anan Gissin.<sup>87</sup>

## September-December 2001

The same battles lingered as Congress returned after Labor Day. MEPCA steadily gained support, as AIPAC continued to push for its passage, stressing Arafat’s rejection of the “most generous compromised ever offered by Israel.”<sup>88</sup> Portions of MEPCA were included in the Foreign Operations Appropriation bill in 2001, and in 2002 the bill—along with a Jerusalem/embassy provision—was passed as a part of the State Department Authorization Bill.

The fear felt by all Americans on September 11 was not lost on members of Congress. They, too, were left searching for answers as to why and how such a catastrophic event could befall the American people. The Middle East was thought to be a key piece of the puzzle. Many believed US regional policies would be reexamined, including those pertaining to the simmering Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

One of the first images beamed to America as the World Trade Center fell and the Pentagon burned was of Palestinians dancing in celebration. Arafat’s call for Palestinians to donate blood did little to diminish the powerful visual.<sup>89</sup> Rep. Peter Deutsch (D-Florida), a strong supporter of Israel, sent his House colleagues a Dear Colleague letter on September 14. “Palestinian popular support for Osama bin Laden and his alleged role in this terrible attack on the United States clearly demonstrates a malicious disregard for the loss of American

lives ... we will always remember who was with us in our time of need and who was not.”<sup>90</sup>

Despite the Palestinian public relations setback, questions were being asked about US involvement in the Middle East. In an interview with Al-Jazeera, Colin Powell indicated that Israel would not play a military role in the US war against bin Laden. The administration also appeared to be wooing Arab allies. “I think we have to do something about the situation in the Middle East,” Powell noted.<sup>91</sup> Powell’s comments rang alarm bells in Israel, as did a statement from President Bush expressing support for the creation of a Palestinian state.

“I call on the Western democracies and primarily on the leader of the free world, the United States: Do not repeat the dreadful mistake of 1938, when enlightened European democracies decided to sacrifice Czechoslovakia for a convenient temporary solution. Do not try to appease the Arabs at our expense,” remarked Prime Minister Sharon.<sup>92</sup> Sharon’s comments were not well received by the Bush administration, raising fear among Israel’s American supporters. Critics of Madrid and Oslo, who felt that George H. W. Bush had forced Israel into negotiations, felt the son might follow his father’s blueprint.

Developments in mid-October colored the debate in Washington and increased the level of violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. On October 17, Israel Minister of Tourism Rehavam Ze’evi, a bombastic right-wing member of the Sharon government, was assassinated. The killing of Ze’evi, who unapologetically called for expelling Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, upped the ante for Sharon, who responded by invading towns and cities throughout the West Bank, resulting in more casualties.

Israel’s response was deemed excessive in the court of world public opinion and US press. “It is time for Israel to pull its tanks back from six major West Bank towns and cease reprisal killings,” wrote the *Baltimore Sun*.<sup>93</sup> The Bush administration urged Sharon to use restraint and demanded that Israel withdraw its troops from Palestinian-controlled areas. “The call for Israel to withdraw is the right policy and is a strongly held view from the United States,” said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.<sup>94</sup> Sharon’s refusal to do so led to media scrutiny. “If Mr. Sharon continues to reject US demands that this self-defeating campaign cease, he too should face consequences,” said the *Washington Post*.<sup>95</sup>

The Bush statement on the creation of Palestinian state, and apparent decision to reengage in the peace process, was warmly received by Jewish groups supporting peace in the ideological center and on the left of the spectrum, including the Israeli Policy Forum, which sent a letter of support to Bush in early October. However, AIPAC and Jewish groups on the Right bristled at the administration’s new approach. “Israel’s Not the Issue; Pass it On,” read one AIPAC fax to Capitol Hill offices.<sup>96</sup> Some groups were particularly troubled by the demand for an Israeli withdrawal. “We condemn this statement (on withdrawal) made by the US State Department that flies in the face of the United States’ own effort in the war against global terrorism. Israel is fighting its own war against global terrorism exactly as the United States is doing,” stated Betty Ehrenberg of the Orthodox Union.<sup>97</sup>

Israel’s supporters on the Hill quickly worked to bolster Israel’s political position. In a hearing before the House International Relations Committee’s Middle East Subcommittee, Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East Bill Burns received an earful. Several members warned the President not to sell out Israel, particularly by launching a new Palestinian-Israeli initiative. In a later hearing of the full Committee, Rep. Robert Menendez (D-New Jersey), a Cuban-American with strong ties to Israel, said that the administration’s comments in support of the creation of a Palestinian state would be interpreted as a reward

for terrorism. The administration was called hypocritical for criticizing the Israeli policy of extrajudicial killings while the United States did the same thing in Afghanistan.<sup>98</sup>

Allegations of US hypocrisy resurfaced throughout the fall. During the last week of October, for example, Reps. Lantos, Robert Wexler (D-Florida), Ackerman, and Adam Schiff each expressed their concerns on the matter to Secretary Powell during a hearing of the House International Relations Committee. Similar concerns were expressed to Powell by Senators George Allen (R-Virginia) and Gordon Smith at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing.

On October 25, John Dingell introduced H.R. 253, a nonbonding resolution endorsing the Mitchell Commission. Its findings were taken verbatim from the Mitchell Report, and it urged all political leaders in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza “to act and speak decisively against violence and incitement to violence. H.R. 253 sends the message that violence in this troubled region serves no one’s interests ... it highlights the fact that peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is in America’s interest now and in the future,” wrote Dingell.<sup>99</sup> The Bush administration registered its support prior to the bill’s introduction. “Passing this resolution, without amendment, would make a positive and welcome contribution to the Administration’s work with the parties to end the violence, implement the Mitchell Committee recommendations, and return to substantive negotiations,” commented the State Department in a letter to Dingell.<sup>100</sup>

AIPAC and groups on the Jewish Right were stonily silent on the Dingell resolution. However, other Jewish groups expressed strong support for the resolution, as did Arab-American groups. “At this sensitive and volatile time, Congressional endorsement of the Mitchell Report would send an important signal of Congress’ support for the Administration’s efforts to end the violence and restart negotiations ... the decision to become a co-sponsor—a decision that would support America, Israel, and the quest for peace,” noted American for Peace Now.<sup>101</sup> Jews for Peace in Palestine and Israel also endorsed the measure.

Reps. Capps and Houghton issued a Dear Colleague letter in support of the Dingell resolution, urging their colleague to support “the quest for peace by co-sponsoring H.ConRes. 253.”<sup>102</sup> The resolution eventually garnered 47 cosponsors, but it was blocked by the House International Relations Committee for the duration of the 107th Congress. Of those who endorsed the bill, only one, Rep. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont), was Jewish. Most cosponsors were Democrats.

Other activities were taking place on Capitol Hill at the end of October. Jews for Peace in Palestine and Israel held a press conference with peace activist Uri Avnery, founder of the pro-peace Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc) on October 25, at which four members of Congress, all Democrats, made statements. “[Avnery’s] visit today underscores the voice of those Israelis who support an immediate return to the peace process,” declared Rep. John Conyers (D-Michigan), the ranking member on the Judiciary Committee.<sup>103</sup> Conyers, an African-American member from Detroit, represents a large number of Arab-American constituents.

“We are writing to propose the formation of a bipartisan House Policy Group on the Middle East and Central Asia. We believe it is important to effectively marshal the collective knowledge, contacts, and experiences of our Members at this crucial time in our nation’s history,” wrote Reps. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio) and Curt Weldon to Speaker Hastert



on October 24.<sup>104</sup> Kaptur and Weldon proposed creating a group that would meet regularly with area experts, behind closed doors, to “explore long range foreign policy options toward the Middle East and Central Asia.” Because of the opposition of Tom DeLay, the bipartisan group was not formed, but the Democratic Caucus created a regional study group headed by Reps. Kaptur and Howard Berman (D-California).

Following September 11, Kaptur proved to be one of the more active members on Middle East issues. She did not hesitate to speak her mind, including her deep reservations about the stalled peace process. She advocated increased engagement with the Arab and Islamic world but did not hesitate to criticize when she saw something objectionable. She was especially critical of the Saudi educational system and US dependence on oil.

Oil and our inability to make ourselves energy self-sufficient here at home, simply because we have not had the will, is our major strategic vulnerability; and again we are faced with major unrest in the Middle East, this time some of that being brought to our own shores. ... As far as having oil as our chief proxy of our foreign policy in the Middle East, what a dangerous dependence. What a dangerous dependence this has proven to be for our people.<sup>105</sup>

DeLay, a close ally of the Christian Right, was one of Israel’s strongest supporters in the 107th Congress. DeLay actively worked to bring the traditionally Democratic Jewish community into the Republican fold. He also promoted the relationship between the evangelical Christian Right, a solid Republican voting bloc, and Israel. “Let me assure you tonight, as long as I remain majority leader, I will use every tool at my disposal to ensure that the House of Representatives continues to preserve and strengthen America’s alliance with the state of Israel,” commented DeLay to a crowd of evangelical Christians and Jews shortly after becoming House Majority Leader.<sup>106</sup> DeLay’s overenthusiastic backing, however, led to embarrassing statements. In advocating support for the incorporation of the West Bank and Gaza into Israel, DeLay proposed citizenship for all Palestinians and, essentially, a one-state solution, an idea vehemently opposed by Israel.<sup>107</sup>

Other Republican leaders followed his cue. Like DeLay, House Majority Leader Richard Arme’s inattention to detail landed him in hot water. In a May 1, 2002 appearance on *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, Arme inadvertently endorsed ethnic cleansing. “I’m content to have Israel grab the entire West Bank. There are many Arab nations that have many hundreds of thousands of acres of land, soil, and property and opportunity to create a Palestinian state,” suggested Arme, who was forced to backtrack a day later.

By November, diplomatic activity intensified. Attention focused on the long-awaited American Middle East initiative, announced in a speech by Secretary Powell on November 19 in Louisville, Kentucky. Two weeks prior to that date, Palestinian Authority President Arafat met with Foreign Minister Peres of Israel. Attempts to facilitate a Bush-Arafat meeting, however, were allegedly undermined by Israel. “Peres meets with Arafat, but every time the administration wants to hold a high-level meeting with the Palestinian leader, Israel complains about it,” an irritated American official said to an Israeli counterpart.<sup>109</sup>

“Both sides need to face up to some plain truths about where this process is heading as they turn to the challenges of negotiating permanent status issues,” said Powell. In his

speech, the Secretary of State placed the onus for making peace on both parties and called for the creation of a Palestinian state. Palestinians and Israelis were critical but accepting of the Powell speech.

The speech raised red flags for many of Israel's supporters. "Given the circumstances, suspicion is easily aroused that the Bush Administration is caving in to Arab pressure . . . the problem here was a sudden declaration when no negotiations are going on," said Rep. Jerry Nadler. "It was a little bit of a shock to have the administration sort of blurt out the notion of a Palestinian state," remarked Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wisconsin). Others Jewish lawmakers voicing concern included Reps. Engel, Gilman, and Shelly Berkley (D-Nevada), as well as Sen. Lieberman.<sup>110</sup>

By mid-November, 710 Palestinians and 188 Israelis had been killed in the course of the intifada.<sup>111</sup> On November 20, Israel announced a settlement construction plan for Jenin. On December 2, a Hamas suicide bombing at a bus stop in Haifa killed fifteen and injured forty. Still, polls in Israel showed a majority of Israelis still favored negotiations with the Palestinians, and 65 percent did not support the elimination of the Palestinian Authority. Another poll revealed, by a margin of 51-48 percent, that a majority of American Jews agreed that it was appropriate for the Bush administration to urge Israel to exercise restraint.<sup>112</sup>

Three Hamas-backed suicide bombings hit Israel over the first weekend of December. The attacks gave rhetorical ammunition to Israel's supporters in Washington, who immediately went on the offensive against Arafat. "Can Arafat Stop the Violence?" asked an editorial written by Dennis Ross, which AIPAC circulated on Capitol Hill.<sup>113</sup> The Bush administration stated that Arafat and the Palestinian Authority needed to do more to control the situation. "I have spoken with Chairman Arafat and have made absolutely clear that these despicable and cowardly actions must be brought to an end through immediate, comprehensive, and sustained actions by the Palestinian Authority," said a statement by Secretary Powell.<sup>114</sup>

### **The Last Call: December 5, 2001**

Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Joseph Biden (D-Delaware) and Ranking Member Jesse Helms introduced S.R. 88 on December 5. An identical resolution, H.R. 280, was introduced in the House by Henry Hyde and Tom Lantos. Both pieces of legislation expressed solidarity with Israel in "our common struggle against the scourge of terrorism" and condemned the Palestinian Authority and Arafat. The House measure replaced a similar resolution, H.R. 278, that had been introduced November 19 by Reps. Curt Weldon and Mike Pence (R-Indiana).

Pence's support for Israel is based upon his conservative Christian beliefs. "In the Bible, God promises Abraham, 'Those who bless you I will bless, and those who curse you I will curse.' So, in some way, I don't fully understand (US policy). I believe our national security is tied to our willingness to stand with the people of Israel," Pence later stated. His colleague, Rep. Mark Souder (R-Indiana), concurred. "God has given Israel this land, not the United States government," noted Souder. In the Senate, Sen. James Inhofe (R-Oklahoma) added that Israel has a right to the West Bank and Gaza because "God said so."<sup>115</sup>

S.R. 88 passed without opposition, but the House version sparked an impassioned

debate. “It seems clear that the actions or inaction of the Palestinian Authority to date merit the President’s taking of all appropriate actions, which could include cutting off our quasi-diplomatic relationship should we not see some serious action on their part,” stated Hyde in an opening statement.<sup>116</sup> He noted that despite the popular misconception, Congress could not cut off assistance to the Palestinian Authority because no US funding was given to it. This was one of Hyde’s reasons for supporting the measure.

“What this resolution does is to essentially set up a situation where the United States appears and in fact does and will be viewed by people in the area as having taken sides,” noted Dingell, who controlled the debate time in opposition to H.R. 280. “The duty of the United States is a very simple one, and that is to work for peace ... peace for Israel, security for Israel, peace and security for the Palestinians,” he added in his opening statement.<sup>117</sup>

“Palestinian apologists have tried to link these activities to Israeli policies. Let me say loud and clear that those who make this argument are the same, in many instances, who claim that the attacks on America on September 11 were motivated by America’s foreign policy,” stated Rep. Berkley. “Mr. Arafat, our patience has finally run out. You have no bargaining chips left,” added Rep. Joseph Crowley.<sup>118</sup>

“So is it some sort of a contest: Should we be pro-Israel or pro-Arab, or anti-Israel or anti-Arab. ... I think there is a third option to this that we so often forget about, Why can we not be pro-American?” remarked Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), who earlier in his career had run for president as the candidate of the Libertarian Party.<sup>119</sup>

More voices were heard as the debate wore on. “Without serious action to eliminate, even harness terrorism, Arafat cannot expect any opportunity for negotiations,” said Rep. Morella, conjuring up the sequence issue.<sup>120</sup> “As a Christian American from the heartland of this country, the great State of Indiana, I am here to say that I represent hundreds of thousands of Americans who still believe that He will bless those who bless Israel,” said Rep. Pence, speaking on behalf of the Christian Right.<sup>121</sup>

“The killing of an Israeli soldier does not justify the shelling, indiscriminate shelling, of Palestinian villages ... We need to be a peacemaker and not just give blanket approval to everything Israel does,” commented a concerned Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-California) who nevertheless voted in favor of the resolution.<sup>122</sup> “Getting Arafat is no solution. Continued humiliation is no solution. This is the method of operation of bullies, not of those who want to return to the peace process ... I have not found the word “peace” mentioned once in this resolution before us today,” quipped Rep. Rahall.<sup>123</sup>

Despite the spirited debate, H.R. 280 passed by a wide margin, with 384 members voting for it, 11 voting against it, and 21 voting “present.” Of the five Arab-American members, only Rahall voted against it. Paul was the lone Republican dissenting vote, though four others voted present. Five members from Michigan voted no or present. Ten African-American members voted present, and five—including Reps. Cynthia McKinney (D-Georgia) and Earl Hilliard (D-Alabama)—voted against it. In 2002, McKinney and Hilliard were defeated; their opponents were heavily funded by Jewish sources. “A torrent of money from out of state American Jewish organizations smashed Earl Hilliard, the first elected black congressperson from Alabama since Reconstruction ... Hilliard had made the fatal error of calling for some measure of even-handedness in the Middle East,” noted Middle East commentator Alexander Cockburn.<sup>124</sup> The decision to target the two in their 2002 primary

elections increased tension between Jewish groups and the Congressional Black Caucus, which by 2006 had not entirely dissipated.

Meanwhile, the Egyptian government continued to draw fire from the media and congressional critics, as did the Saudis, especially in wake of the September 11 attacks. “In effect, Mr. Mubarak and Mr. Moussa (former Egyptian Foreign Minister and current head of the Arab League) are both backing the military action of the US alliance and the political position of Osama bin Laden, who on Sunday claimed that unjust American policies in Israel and Iraq justified his acts of mass murder,” noted the *Washington Post*, observing also that Mubarak “props himself with \$2 billion a year in US aid.”<sup>125</sup> Congressman Frank Wolf (R-Virginia), who champions international Christian issues, issued a Dear Colleague letter rebuking the Egyptian government for tolerating anti-Americanism in its “semi-official” press.<sup>126</sup>

President Bush’s decision to approve an arms deal with Egypt—providing Harpoon missile and patrol boats—was intensely scrutinized on Capitol Hill. “A stable and prosperous Egypt is in our interest, while an arms race between Israel and Egypt is not,” suggested Rep. Lantos.<sup>127</sup> Sen. Biden, one of several lawmakers questioning the merits of the arms package, asked Secretary Powell to justify the sale. Led by Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott, the Mississippi delegation, where the patrol boats are manufactured, defended the deal on economic grounds.

An October 30 editorial in the *Washington Post* summarized Egypt’s increasingly vulnerable position in Washington as 2001 drew to a close:

Mr. Mubarak may be a longtime American ally, as American and Egyptian defenders both insist. Unlike many Arab nations, Egypt has recognized Israel’s right to exist. It allows more freedom internally than Iraq or Saudi Arabia. But those sad comparisons no longer seem sufficient grounds for accepting the unacceptable. The poisonous words encouraged by Egyptian officialdom, and the absence of other voices, run counter not only to America’s interest but also, in the long run, Egypt’s as well.<sup>128</sup>

## 2002: An Overview

In 2002, the White House seemed at odds with the international community over its Middle East policy. To the frustration of regional and European allies, President Bush focused on Iraq rather than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Bush’s refusal to deal with Yasser Arafat stymied diplomatic movement toward a cease-fire.

In the absence of what former President Jimmy Carter described as “a comprehensible Middle East policy,” Congress continued to weigh in on the intifada throughout 2002, usually by re-iterating its support for Israel.<sup>129</sup> A particularly odious resolution introduced by Rep. DeLay angered many in the House. H.R. 392 declared that Israel—which was portrayed as fighting Palestinians in a land dispute—and the United States—fighting al-Qaeda—were “now engaged in a common struggle.” It noted that, on a proportional basis, Israel had suffered “three times the number killed” in New York and Washington in the September 11 terrorist attacks.<sup>130</sup> Originally, DeLay had planned to introduce a sub-

stantive piece of legislation cutting ties to the Palestinian Authority, but he withdrew the measure and replaced it with the harsh but symbolic H.Res. 392 at the urging of the White House.<sup>131</sup> Despite the unease some members of the House felt about tying Israel's conflict to America's, the debate was a near-repeat of December fight over H.Con.Res. 280, with 21 members voting no and another 29 present.

Because only six of the fifty representatives voting no or present were Republicans, the Democratic National Committee was concerned about straining relations with Jewish Americans; this alliance provided the party both votes and money. More troubling, Democrats voting against the measure included senior party loyalists, such as Dingell, David Obey (D-Wisconsin), George Miller (D-California), and outgoing Minority Whip David Bonior (D-Michigan). Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe held an emergency meeting with House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt and Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle after the vote to discuss the matter.<sup>132</sup>

Apparently, the Republican strategy to weaken the Democratic hold over the American-Jewish community bore fruit. "What the Democrats have to understand is that Jews are feeling terribly abandoned by the world community. In the face of that abandonment, up come people like DeLay and other House and Senate members, who are willing to say, 'We are standing with Israel,'" noted Rabbi Shmuel Goldin of California while attending a DeLay fundraiser.<sup>133</sup> DeLay, it should be noted, won the 2003 Zionist Organization of America "Defender of Israel" award.<sup>134</sup>

Egypt and Saudi Arabia each had a difficult time with Congress in 2002. Because of congressional pressure, Egypt received a smaller arms package than it was promised in late 2001.<sup>135</sup> Additionally, an array of issues that further tarnished Egypt's image were raised in Congress. Rep. Engel hosted a briefing by the Middle East Media and Research Institute (MEMRI) on anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism in the Egyptian press.<sup>136</sup> Reps. Joe Pitts (R-Pennsylvania) and Tony Hall (D-Ohio) wrote President Mubarak to express their concern over attacks on Coptic churches.<sup>137</sup> Rep. Wolf weighed in on the imprisonment of Saad Eddin Ibrahim.<sup>138</sup> In wake of the 2001 arrest of fifty-two men on charges of lewd conduct, thirty-five members of the House—led by Rep. Lantos—wrote Mubarak about Egypt's treatment of homosexuals. And Egypt's opposition to the US invasion of Iraq was noted by some Bush loyalists.

While September 11 damaged Saudi Arabia's standing among the American people, most congressional criticism of the Kingdom occurred after the announcement of the Abdullah peace plan. This suggests that the deterioration of Saudi Arabia's Hill support and the introduction of the peace plan was not a coincidence. The Abdullah plan, adopted at the Arab summit in Beirut on March 28, 2002, called for normalized relations between the Arab world and Israel in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 borders.

Initially, the Israeli reaction was positive. "Under the assumption that what has been published is correct it must be said that we're speaking of a positive trend," noted Sharon Cabinet Secretary Gideon Saar.<sup>139</sup> Israeli president Moshe Katsav offered to travel to Riyadh to further discuss the plan. President Bush welcomed the initiative and called the Crown Prince to thank him.<sup>140</sup>

However, conservative Washington-based supporters of Israel quickly condemned it, seeing any plan requiring Israel to withdraw as either a surrender or trick. "In 35 years of studying the Middle East, I have rarely seen anything to rival the Saudi 'peace plan' for

cynicism (of those pushing the plan) and gullibility (of those buying it) ... the plan is an obvious Saudi ploy to blunt American anger at the shockingly deep Saudi role in Sept. 11 by posing as peacemakers,” wrote the *Washington Post*’s Charles Krauthammer.<sup>141</sup> Rep. Gilman attached Krauthammer’s piece to a Dear Colleague letter.<sup>142</sup>

Over the next several months, Saudi Arabia was the subject of a series of unflattering Dear Colleague letters. Reps. Lowey (D-New York) and Morella rebuked Saudi Arabia for its treatment of women, Lantos and Deutsch criticized it for anti-Semitism, Rep. Jim Davis (D-Florida) found fault with its education system, and Frank Wolf condemned it for kidnapping a Saudi-American girl. J.D. Hayworth (R-Arizona) demanded that Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar apologize for “likening Yasser Arafat to George Washington.”<sup>143</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I was the legislative director of John Dingell’s office during the period discussed in this article, and I have not included every action taken nor the views of all parties who weighed in on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2001. I am simply reporting what came across my desk, which tells a story worthy of examination.

In the fall of 2002, Jimmy Carter concluded, “Tragically, our government is abandoning any sponsorship of substantive negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. Our apparent policy is to support almost every Israeli action in the occupied Palestinian territories and to condemn and isolate Palestinians as blanket targets of our war on terrorism, while Israeli settlements expand and Palestinian enclaves shrink.”<sup>144</sup> Carter’s words are appropriate to describe the actions of the 107th Congress.

Congress was quick to express solidarity with Israel after the start of the intifada and ended 2001 by taking a similar action. Yet the course of the intifada did not change due to congressional action, nor does evidence suggest that the intifada significantly shaped legislative branch policy. If anything, it encouraged the Bush administration to chart a passive course while continuing to provide Israel with ample military, economic, and diplomatic support as the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories continued to deteriorate.

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- <sup>118</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>119</sup> Ibid.
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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

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