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February 7, 2002

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Recent events have made it increasingly difficult to be positive about the prospects for peace in the Middle East. I write you to register my thoughts and concerns on the ongoing violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel. The violence that has embroiled the region since the start of the Intifada has in no way helped Israel or the Palestinians, and has left nearly 1,200 human beings dead, many of them children and most of them innocent civilians. This conflict has been steadily escalating both rhetorically and militarily. Consequently, not only has the peace process and the Mitchell Commission plan been shelved, but the implementation of a cease-fire along the lines of the Tenet Security Workplan is at this time unrealistic.

Mr. President, without meaningful, sustained, and consistent American involvement in reestablishing dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, with Yasser Arafat as its leader, this problem will only fester. It will continue to cause instability in the region and the world, and profoundly harm the long-term interests of Israel, the Palestinian people, and our allies in the Middle East. Most importantly, the Administration must commit itself to solving this crisis in a fair manner that is acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians because it jeopardizes the short and long-term interests of the United States.

Given the gravity of the situation, I urge the Administration to fully commit itself to the cause of peace by sending General Anthony Zinni back to the region at the earliest possible date, negotiating a workable cease-fire, implementing the Mitchell Commission plan in its entirety, and initiating dialog between the parties aimed at reaching a comprehensive peace treaty. I would also advise your Administration to be cautious and consistent in the public statements it makes pertaining to events transpiring on the ground. Failure to actively engage in the peace process in a fair and consistent manner will further destabilize the region and increases the probability that this conflict will spark a larger war that will have grave consequences not only for the combatants, but for the United States and the region.

Mr. President, I am also alarmed about some of the recent statements made by the Administration that have been perceived as one-sided and unfair, and give the impression

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that the United States is failing to be an honest broker. By censuring only the actions or inactions of the Palestinian side, we are increasingly viewed as an enabler and an obstruction to peace. This perception has already caused the United States to lose credibility in the region. It is in our national interest, and in the interest of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and the world for the United States to play a constructive role in working for peace.

The world took note of the State of the Union Address, particularly when you said, "America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere. No nation owns these aspirations, and no nation is exempt from them. We have no intention of imposing our culture. But America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance." People in this troubled region, regardless of faith or nationality, must believe that the United States will ultimately do the right thing, which again requires a fair and evenhanded approach to this conflict.

Let me be unequivocal in stating that there is no justification for killing innocent civilians. The spate of recent attacks on innocent Israeli civilians by Palestinian extremists is truly evil. I fail to comprehend what would compel a young man or woman to surrender their life in an immoral, misguided effort to kill innocent people. Unfortunately, the response to such attacks only make matters worse. Limitations on movement, the use of American-built tanks and F-16's, destruction of homes and constructions of settlements, extrajudicial killings, and the virtual detention of Yasir Arafat by Israel only fan the flames of passion and increases the appeal of extremists.

Attempts to delegitimize President Arafat serve no constructive purpose. Regardless of his record in office, Yasir Arafat was elected as President of the Palestinian Authority by the Palestinian people. Nearly 80 percent of eligible Palestinians turned out to vote in the 1996 Palestinian elections, which were monitored and certified by the National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center. He is the only properly elected leader of the Palestinian people with whom discussions may be legitimately conducted.

In addition to the political and physical damage, both the Palestinians and Israelis are suffering great economic hardship. Never strong, the economic situation on the Palestinian side has grown progressively worse, as unemployment now exceeds 50 percent. A recent public opinion survey found that 53.2 percent of Palestinian adults are worried to various degrees about their children's means of subsistence. Foreign investment in Israel has fallen dramatically, from $11.2 billion in 2000 to $3.9 billion in 2001. Investors liquidated $120 million in Israeli securities in December alone.

The economic fallout from this political-military dispute has also affected our pocketbooks and those of our regional allies. In spite of their commitment to the peace process, Egypt and Jordan have been punished because of their proximity. Accordingly, both nations appear far less attractive and stable as markets for potential investors. While Jordan successfully negotiated and signed a Free Trade Agreement with the United

States, its benefits are yet to be realized. Both Egypt and Jordan have suffered significant losses in tourism revenue, major sources of income and jobs. American businesses operating in the region have been hurt, and are limited in growth potential due to the poor business climate brought on by this conflict.

As Secretary Powell has stated, United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, Camp David, and all agreements made in the last decade have spelled out the principles upon which a final peace settlement will be made. Israel will get security and the opportunity to forge economic, political, and cultural ties to its neighbors; Palestinians will get an independent state. Israeli and Palestinian citizens alike will all have the opportunity to live normal lives. Both parties win, extremists lose, and world peace and security are enhanced.

On November 19, Secretary Powell stated that obtaining a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians in "a region where Israelis and Arabs can live together in peace, security, and dignity" is our central diplomatic challenge. I urge you to accept this challenge and fully commit the Administration as an honest and fair broker for peace. The costs of not doing so are far too high for the United States, the region, and the world.

With every good wish,

Sincerely yours,

John D. Dingell
Member of Congress