Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 1, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing out of our shared concern over 60 years of conflict in the Middle East and a mutual desire to see peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. While the obstacles are formidable, we agree with you that every effort should be made to try to realize that peace at the soonest possible time.

Many decades of U.S. engagement have helped lead to peace treaties between Israel and both Egypt and Jordan. We strongly believe that the best way to achieve future success between Israelis and Palestinians will be by adhering to basic principles that have undergirded our policy in this arena. These include the following: 1) acceptance that the parties themselves must negotiate the details of any agreement. While the U.S. has an important role to play, the parties themselves are the ones who will need to live with whatever agreement is reached; 2) understanding of the need to work closely with our democratic ally Israel, who will be taking the greatest risks in any peace agreement. No doubt our two governments will agree on many issues and disagree on others. The proven best way forward is to work closely and privately together both on areas of agreement and especially on areas of disagreement. The United States must be both a trusted mediator and a devoted friend to Israel; 3) continuation of our insistence on an absolute Palestinian commitment to end violence, terror, and incitement and to build the institutions necessary for a viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace with the Jewish state of Israel inside secure borders. Once terrorists are no longer in control of Gaza and as responsible Palestinian forces become more capable of demonstrating the ability to govern and to maintain security, an accord with Israel will be easier to attain; and 4) promotion of far greater involvement and participation by the Arab states both in moving toward normal ties with Israel and in supporting moderate Palestinians. Everyone in the region has a stake in the success of these negotiations. Everyone in the region needs to play a role in helping to ensure that success.

We wish you the best of luck and look forward to working closely with you on these critical issues in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely yours,

Steny H. Hoyer
MAJORITY LEADER

Eric Cantor
REPUBLICAN WHIP

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