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Clinton Overrules Republican Lawmaker's Hold on Palestinian Aid

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Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is allowing U.S. funds to flow to the West Bank and Gaza despite a hold by House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., a rare display of executive-branch authority that angered the key lawmaker concerned about protecting her congressional oversight role.

A State Department official said that a letter was delivered on Tuesday to key members of Congress informing them of Clinton's decision to move forward with the \$147 million package of the fiscal year 2011 economic support funds for the Palestinian people, despite Ros-Lehtinen's hold. Administrations generally do not disburse funding over the objections of lawmakers on relevant committees.

The funds deliver "critical support to the Palestinian people and those leaders seeking to combat extremism within their society and build a more stable future. Without funding, our programs risk cancellation," the official, who was not authorized to speak about the issue, said in an e-mail. "Such an occurrence would undermine the progress that has been made in recent years in building Palestinian institutions and improving stability, security, and economic prospects, which benefits Israelis and Palestinians alike.?"

Late last month, Ros-Lehtinen sent a letter to Clinton and U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Rajiv Shah, informing them she will lift her hold on some \$88.6 million of the Palestinian aid package -- out of the full \$147 million -- under special conditions. Appropriations State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee Chairwoman Kay Granger, R-Texas, agreed to release her hold on the full assistance package on humanitarian grounds.

"The U.S. has given \$3 billion in aid to the Palestinians in the last five years alone, and what do we have to show for it?" Ros-Lehtinen said on Wednesday in a statement to National Journal. "Now the administration is sending even more. Where is the accountability for U.S. taxpayer dollars?"

Ros-Lehtinen earlier said she was disappointed that the administration "would employ hardball tactics against Congress and threaten to send, over congressional objection, U.S. taxpayer dollars to the Palestinian Authority." She does not want the funds used for assistance and recovery programs in Hamas-run Gaza; road construction projects in the West Bank, unless vital for security; or trade facilitation, tourist promotion, or scholarships for Palestinian students.

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