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# ATFP Briefs House Committee: 'Timely US Participation in Palestinian, Israeli Security Essential'

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## Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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[2] February 10, 2005 - 12:00am

Washington DC, Feb. 10 -- American Task Force on Palestine (ATFP) testified today at a U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations briefing on 'The Way Forward in the Mideast Peace Process.' The committee heard testimony from Henry A. Kissinger, former Secretary of State; Dennis A. Ross, former chief Middle East peace negotiator; Ziad Asali, President of ATFP; and Danielle Pletka, Vice President Foreign and Defense Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

In his testimony Kissinger said, 'This is the best opportunity I have seen in several decades to make a breakthrough' in the conflict. He later said that he favors international aid to the Palestinians to provide immediate assistance.

Ross also highlighted the role of economic aid in creating political solutions. The United States must help to build Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' capability, in part by providing 'tangible economic aid such as building housing,' Ross said.

Ross enumerated several other actions necessary to ending the four years of hostilities, including securing the recently agreed cease-fire, and maintaining U.S. involvement. '[Israel PM Ariel] Sharon and Abu Mazen both have a stake in calm,' he said. 'There is a strong convergence of interests there.'

Asali outlined three tasks to be accomplished this year in order to take advantage of the current political window of opportunity: Establishing close security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, with active US support and prompt activation of committees established in Sharm el Shaikh with scrupulous implementation of agreements by both

parties; both parties implementing their commitments under the Roadmap, as they coordinate the Gaza Disengagement Plan; and reforming and restructuring the Palestinian Authority.

Asali emphasized that these tasks can be accomplished only with engaged U.S. participation.

We can lay the foundations for a strategic realignment where Palestine will be an ally of the United States and a partner to Israel in peace, Asali said. Ultimately, security and peace will be achieved by establishing a viable, contiguous, independent and democratic Palestine, with a shared Jerusalem as a capital for two states, and a fair solution to the refugee problem according to international law. The painful concession Israel must make is to return the occupied territories to their rightful owners.

Israeli security and Palestinian security are inseparable, Asali said later, in response to a question from a member of the House.

The urgency of timely intervention cannot be overstated, Asali said. What all parties do and do not do in the coming months will determine whether this glimmer of hope becomes the dawn of a new era of peace, or proves merely the twilight before another long night of conflict and chaos. We must act decisively in the interests of the Israeli, Palestinian and Arab peoples, and, above all, in our own American national interests.

In contrast to the other three speakers, Pletka said that, The United States should preserve our distance and not become invested in the peace process.

Concluding the briefing, committee member Jim Leach said, The U.S. has a vested interest in solving this conflict, for the people of the region and for ourselves. We have to lead the process; we cannot abandon it. We received seminal testimony today. If we do not act now the consequences will be disastrous not just for Israelis, Palestinians and the people of the region, but for the United States and the entire world.

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