

By Congressman David Price -R

MR. SPEAKER, I do not intend to oppose this measure because I agree with its basic premise: that the United States Congress strongly supports a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and opposes any action that will make such an outcome harder to achieve.

However, I have serious reservations about several of the assertions this resolution makes – as well as those it doesn't make – about recent developments in, and U.S. policy toward, Israel and the Palestinian territories. These concerns are more than abstract: at a time of generational change in the Middle East, the positions that this Congress takes on an issue of such vital importance will have lasting implications for our nation's goals and interests in the region.

For two decades, irrespective of which party has controlled the White House or Congress, the central aim of U.S. policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been to encourage a negotiated resolution based on the principle of a democratic, Jewish state of Israel living side by side in peace and security with a viable, democratic Palestinian state. Republican and Democratic presidents alike have affirmed that such an outcome will only be achieved through direct negotiations between the two parties, and have opposed any action by either side that undermines or diminishes the prospects for a negotiated peace.

To be sure, the Palestinian leadership's intent to pursue diplomatic recognition at the United Nations qualifies as such an action, and on this point I agree with the sponsors of this resolution. I also share their concerns about the prospect of a Palestinian unity government that does not recognize Israel's right to exist or renounce violence against innocent civilians. Either development would represent a major setback for the peace process as we know it, and Congress is right to warn Palestinian leaders about the consequences of their course of action.

But as usual, the resolution before us today tells only half the story. It says nothing about Israel's responsibility to act as a serious negotiating partner and abide by its previous commitments under the Road Map and other agreements. It says nothing about Israel's refusal to halt settlement construction in order to allow direct negotiations to resume – even when the Obama Administration offered a lavish package of aid and assurances for Israel to do something that was manifestly in its own interest to begin with. It condemns the Palestinian

president for his unilateral actions while failing to comprehend that it has been Israel's intransigence that has led him to view the United Nations as his only recourse. And as usual, the resolution has been rushed to the floor without any serious debate or any opportunity for input from the many members of this body who care about this critical issue.

This resolution is also being considered at a pivotal moment in the history of the peace process, as well as the history of the broader Middle East. After years of false starts and broken promises, the prospects for a negotiated peace appear as dim today as at any time in recent memory, and may grow dimmer still as the political winds in the Arab world shift in unpredictable ways. Now, perhaps more than ever before, strong and decisive U.S. leadership is needed to persuade both sides of the urgency of the moment and bring them both back to the negotiating table. It is only a matter of time before there is no table left around which to negotiate.

Yet instead of urging the President to redouble his commitment to the pursuit of a peace, we are urging him to lead a diplomatic initiative to oppose Palestinian recognition. Instead of encouraging him to bring the full weight of American ideas, influence, and resources to bear on this critical issue, we are asking him to suspend U.S. assistance to the Palestinian Authority – the very assistance that has been so essential to laying the foundations for a future Palestinian state. Instead of congratulating him for his efforts to revive the stalled negotiations by outlining his ideas for the boundaries of a future Palestinian state, too many of my colleagues seem more interested in manufacturing a controversy for political gain. Unfortunately, the current Israeli prime minister seems all too willing to play along, despite the fact that the two previous U.S. presidents – not to mention at least two former Israeli prime ministers – have advocated positions nearly identical to that outlined by President Obama.

So while I will cast my vote in favor of H. Res. 268, I am reminded of the story of Nero playing the fiddle as Rome burns. The Middle East is transforming before our eyes, and the window of opportunity for the United States to achieve a just and lasting resolution to this age-old conflict may be closing rapidly. We should seize this moment of opportunity and recommit ourselves to the pursuit of peace before it is too late.

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