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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

June 15, 2021

The Honorable Jamie Raskin
House of Representatives
2242 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Raskin:

This will respond to your letter of June 4th regarding assistance to the Palestinians and importantly correct several inaccuracies in your letter.

First, you mischaracterized that the Senate is holding urgent humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. This is simply not true. Congress does not have the ability to “hold” humanitarian assistance funds once appropriated. The administration has already released over \$20 million in congressionally-appropriated International Disaster Assistance funds, not subject to congressional notification, for urgent humanitarian assistance. And the administration has provided \$150 million for UNRWA under the Migration and Refugee Assistance account which also is not subject to congressional holds. Your letter misrepresents those facts.

To be clear, the only State and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funds subject to congressional notification and “holds” are longer-term economic, development, and security assistance projects using economic support funds (ESF) and international narcotics and law enforcement funds (INCLE). There were never any holds on the INCLE funds the administration recently notified to Congress, which both Congress and the Israeli government support because it contributes to security in the West Bank.

However, longer-term development projects remain subject to several restrictions under the law. Congress has passed laws including importantly the Taylor Force Act, which you supported. These laws are designed to ensure that the ESF funds you highlight do not directly benefit the Palestinian Authority (PA) while it promotes “pay to slay” programs, or get diverted to Hamas and other terrorist organizations. As you know, the PA and the Palestine Liberation Organization continue to incentivize and celebrate violence against Israelis through the egregious “pay to slay” program. In 2019 alone, the Palestinians spent \$151 million to support imprisoned terrorists. Additionally, you are likely unaware of a recent U.S. Government Accountability Office report that raised concerns with USAID subcontractor non-compliance with applicable anti-terrorism laws. These issues deserve rigorous oversight.

Sadly, just after the Biden Administration announced additional assistance to the West Bank and Gaza, PA President Abbas issued a \$42,000 martyr’s payment to a Palestinian Islamic Jihad

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terrorist who stabbed two Israelis to death in 2015. This is outrageous. That abhorrent practice concerns me deeply and should be repugnant to all members of Congress.

Also, your letter fails to recognize the funds already released. Days before your letter was written, like-minded colleagues and I released a portion of the administration's ESF requests that the administration identified as 'quick impact', which were definitively Taylor Force compliant, and would positively benefit stability in affected areas.

Currently, there are multiple holds on the longer-term projects as they are under review for compliance with the law. I hope you and your colleagues are not suggesting we should turn a blind eye to the potential of U.S. funds being used to support terrorism.

Further, the \$151 million provided by the PA dwarfs the tens of millions the Biden Administration has requested in ESF notifications to Congress. Unfortunately, both Hamas and the PA have exacerbated the plight of the Palestinian people with their own narrow agendas for far too long. A blank check will not improve the condition of the Palestinian people while their leaders in the West Bank and Gaza subordinate their needs to violent agendas.

If you and your colleagues truly care about the plight of the Palestinian people, I would strongly encourage you to condemn and call on the PA to end its egregious "pay to slay" program and instead direct this money toward humanitarian assistance and other economic projects. This would have a far greater benefit for the Palestinian people than the portion of U.S. taxpayer-funded ESF that is still under review.

So long as the "pay to slay" policy and the activities it supports continue, you can count on me to robustly examine any funds which may wind up in the hands of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, or the PA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Risch". The signature is stylized with a large, looped initial "J" and a cursive "Risch".

JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

CC:

The Honorable David E Price, Member of Congress

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky, Member of Congress

The Honorable Donald S. Beyer Jr., Member of Congress

The Honorable Jesús G. "Chuy" García, Member of Congress

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The Honorable Jim Cooper, Member of Congress

The Honorable Alan Lowenthal, Member of Congress

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly, Member of Congress

The Honorable Jared Huffman, Member of Congress

The Honorable Andy Levin, Member of Congress

The Honorable Ro Khanna, Member of Congress

The Honorable Mark Pocan, Member of Congress

The Honorable Ilhan Omar, Member of Congress

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren, Member of Congress

The Honorable Joaquin Castro, Member of Congress

The Honorable Sara Jacobs, Member of Congress

The Honorable James P. McGovern, Member of Congress

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The Honorable Marie Newman, Member of Congress

The Honorable Al Green, Member of Congress

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The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Member of Congress

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The Honorable Brad Sherman, Member of Congress

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The Honorable Ron Kind, Member of Congress

The Honorable Frederica S. Wilson, Member of Congress