If we fail to act, years from now some future Professor Bernanke, now Chairman of the Fed, will study our actions and will absolutely marvel at the missed opportunity—trillions of dollars committed to the financial sector, tens of billions denied the manufacturing sector, with millions of people losing their jobs on top of the more than 1 million who have already been laid off this year. If we fail to act, we will commit one of the biggest economic sins of omission in our history.

Majority Leader REID is absolutely right to insist that we stay here as long as we need to get this job done. Let's make it a truly merry Christmas in millions of living rooms in Lordstown, in Walton Hills, in Toledo, in Dayton, in Sharonville, in Mansfield, in towns all across the State.

I yield the floor.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to extend morning business until 4 p.m.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. MCCASKILL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SPECTER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SPECTER. Madam President, I further ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business be extended beyond 4 o'clock, and that I be permitted to speak in morning business for up to 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

U.S. POLICY TOWARDS ISRAEL

Mr. SPECTER. Madam President, I have sought recognition for a few purposes. First, I ask unanimous consent that my statement regarding U.S. policy toward Israel be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. POLICY REGARDING ISRAEL

I have sought recognition to address the subject of United States policy regarding Israel and the Mideast peace process as we look forward to a new Administration and a new Congress next year. It is my expectation that the United States will maintain the close, strong relationship with Israel based on U.S. national interests, especially security interests, and our close cultural and historic ties with Israel.

While efforts are being made to bring democratic institutions to Iraq and Afghanistan, Israel is the only democracy in the region with our shared values. The record shows the U.S. vigorously supports a close relationship with Israel for good reason. Since the accords between Israel and Egypt in 1978, the United States has given substantial foreign aid to those two countries to improve their security and to promote the Mideast peace process. Since my election in 1980, I have voted for aid to Israel in the amount of $81.6 billion, consisting of $28.8 billion in economic aid—including $1.3 billion to resettle Jewish refugees—and $52.8 billion in military aid. In the case of Egypt, I have supported $35.2 billion in military aid and $23.9 billion in economic aid.

The importance of Israel as a strategic U.S. ally has motivated the U.S. to place special emphasis on Israel's security, part of which is promoting the Middle East Peace Process. During my 28 years in the Senate, I have traveled to many foreign countries in connection with my membership on the Intelligence Committee, which I chaired in the 104th Congress, and my membership on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, where I am now the longest serving Republican on the Subcommittee.

As part of these travels, I have visited Israel 25 times and Syria 17 times with a view to assisting on a peace treaty between those two countries. As I see it, the key to such an accord is the Golan Heights captured by Israel in the 1967 War. Syria has long sought a return of the Golan. Only Israel can decide for itself whether its interests warrant returning the Golan to Syria for significant reciprocal concessions. Obviously, the strategic considerations are vastly different now than they were in 1967 since rockets can easily fly over the Golan. If Israel could rely on Syrian commitments to allow Lebanon to function as a sovereign nation, stop assisting Hezbollah and withdraw support for Hamas, Israel might conclude it was in its interest to return the Golan to Syria.

Israel and Syria were reportedly very close to a pact in 1995 when Yitzhak Rabin was Prime Minister and in 2000 when Ehud Barak was Prime Minister. Diplomacy has produced some results many thought impossible. Negotiations with North Korea have reduced that nation's nuclear threat although that situation remains volatile and uncertain. Negotiations have moved Libya's Muammar Qaddafi from horrendous acts of terrorism, including the blowing up of Pan Am 103 and bombing of a Berlin discotheque, resulting in the murder of US military personnel, to a willingness to negotiate and reform. Libya made reparations in excess of $1,000,000,000 and abandoned plans to design nuclear weapons in order to be admitted to the family of nations.

My studies and travel in the region lead me to believe that next year may be the right time to secure an Israeli-Syrian Peace Treaty if the new Administration aggressively pursues that objective.

As I prepare to travel to Israel and Syria in the next several weeks, I have reviewed my Senate activities on this subject. I think it would be useful to list some of the steps I have taken so that my colleagues and others will understand my reasons for optimism and so that the incoming Obama Administration will have my thinking in setting its course on foreign relations in the Mideast.

I first became deeply involved in an Israeli security issue shortly after being elected in 1981 regarding the proposed sale of E–3A airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft by the U.S. to Saudi Arabia. President Reagan notified the Congress that he intended to sell Saudi Arabia $8.5 billion in arms—which at the time would have been the largest weapons transfer in U.S. history—including 5 AWACS aircraft and 101 sets of conformal fuel tanks for F–15 aircraft. I opposed the sale on the grounds that it undercut the Camp David accords. I wrote to President Reagan in August 1981 to urge him not to proceed with the proposed sale, and on October 28, 1981 I said on the Senate floor:

''Until the Saudis are prepared to embrace the principles of the Camp David accords and support the United States on this cornerstone of United States-Mideast foreign policy, it is my judgment that they should not be rewarded with the AWACS and the F–15 enhancement. . . . By focusing on the special United States-Saudi relationship . . . the administration has already moved a step away from the best hope for a Middle East peace—the Camp David accords and the now-reinstated autonomy talks between Egypt and Israel.''

I was one of 12 Republican senators to vote for a resolution disapproving the proposed arms sale. The resolution was rejected 48–52.

The same policy that led me to oppose the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia has guided my actions throughout my Senate career on Israeli security issues. Before being elected to the Senate in 1980, I visited Israel in 1964, 1969 and 1980. My first visit as a United States Senator came in September 1982. During my 1982 visit I met with Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Labor Party leader Shimon Peres, and other Israeli leaders. I urged Prime Minister Begin to discuss with President Reagan the issue of a Mideast peace. I understood the two differed on what approach to take, but as I said on the Senate floor following my trip:

''As I [saw] it, there [were] major misunderstandings which could be resolved, or at least clarified, by personal diplomacy between these two men of good will.''

Prime Minister Begin and I also spoke about my meeting with Lebanese President-elect Bashir Gemayel who was assassinated shortly after I visited him in his Beirut office in September 1982. I said that I saw some hope of Lebanese unification, and Prime Minister Begin stressed that a peace treaty with Lebanon was very important to Israel.

I returned to Israel in May 1983 and met with Prime Minister Begin, Defense Minister Moshe Arens, and Labor leader Shimon Peres. Prime Minister Begin stressed his desire to secure the delivery of F–16's to Israel before the scheduled date of 1985, saying that the planes were crucial for Israel's security.

Following my meetings in Israel, I traveled to Egypt, where I met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. As I stated in my trip report:

''I began [the meeting] by conveying Prime Minister Begin's respects as Prime Minister Begin asked me to do, and President Mubarak responded about his esteem for Prime Minister Begin, saying that the Prime Minister was a man of his word and also . . . tough.' ''

I pursued a discussion with President Mubarak on the question of further negotiations between Israel and Egypt in pursuance of the principles of the Camp David accords.

In October 1983, I was an original cosponsor of legislation introduced by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan that would have required that the U.S. Embassy in Israel and the residence of the American Ambassador to Israel be located in Jerusalem. Hearings were held, but the legislation was not passed by the Senate.

I made my first trip to Syria in 1984 and met Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara. Following the lead of Congressman Stephen Solarz on an important issue, I urged the Foreign Minister to permit Syrian Jewish

women to emigrate because the limited number of Jewish men in Syria presented them with limited opportunities of marriage. Mr. Shara demurred. I raised the issue with President Hafez al-Asad four years later.

I returned to the Mideast in January 1987 to examine Persian Gulf security concerns as affected by the Iran-Iraq war, and again a year later, in January 1988. In Israel in January 1988, I met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Minister of Industry and Commerce Ariel Sharon. I urged Prime Minister Shamir to enter into negotiations that would provide guarantees for peace. From Israel I traveled to Egypt, where I voiced my objections to President Mubarak's statement that the Camp David accords ''were a thing of the past.''

It was during my second trip to Syria, in January 1988, that I first encountered President Hafez al-Asad in a meeting that lasted 4 hours 38 minutes. We covered a wide range of issues: the Iran-Iraq war, which had just concluded; Syrian-Israeli relations; and U.S.-U.S.S.R. relations. I found President al-Asad at that time to be a very engaging interlocutor. I suggested, on a number of occasions, that I had taken a sufficient amount of his time, offering to leave, but he generously extended the time until we had discussed a very wide range of issues.

I also urged Asad to permit Syrian Jewish women to move abroad. Asad resisted, saying that Syria was ''at war'' with Israel, and that such emigration could only strengthen Syria's enemy. I continued to press the issue in subsequent meetings with Asad, and as I reported in a January 1994 editorial in The New York Post:

''Asad responded with a romantic offer that he would allow any Jewish woman to leave when a suitor came to Syria and took her to the United States to marry.''

I relayed that offer to the active Syrian Jewish community in Brooklyn and elsewhere. Ultimately, Damascus altered its policy and allowed Jews to emigrate.

At the time of my first meeting with President Hafez al-Asad, Syria was totally uninterested in peace negotiations with Israel. Upon returning to the Senate, I voiced my desire to see the Secretary of State appoint an Ambassador Plenipotentiary, like former Secretary of State Kissinger, to concentrate on the Middle East peace process, as I understood that the President could not focus all his attention on the region.

I again traveled to the region in January 1989. In Bethlehem that January, I met with the Bethlehem's beleaguered mayor, Elias Friej, who had been personally threatened by Palestinian Leader Yasir Arafat after the mayor had proposed a truce with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in which the Israeli Army would cease using force in return for a cessation of violence by the Intifada. In my report to the Senate following my travels, I urged the prospective new secretary of state, James Baker III:

''to reexamine the merits of our dealing with the PLO. At an absolute minimum, we should require that the substantial showing by the PLO of deeds instead of rhetoric.''

I traveled with Senator Richard Shelby to the region in January 1990. In a visit to Damascus, I again met with President Hafez al-Asad. As I outlined in my December 2006 article in The Washington Quarterly, Asad initially rebuffed offers to open talks with Israel, stating that Syria would only participate in talks sponsored by all five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Israel opposed this format, believing that the odds would be stacked four to one against it, with only the United States supporting it in negotiations. When I pressed Asad on this issue again in 1990, he indicated that he had changed his position on the proposal and that Syria would be willing to participate in meetings organized only by the United States and the Soviet Union. As I reported in a March 6, 1990 floor statement, this change was significant because it appeared to be part of a broader Syrian initiative:

''In our January 1989 meeting, I asked on three separate occasions, separated by respectable periods of time, what it would take for Syria and Israel to become friends. President Asad answered, after a third query, that it was not a question of friendship, but that 'normalizing' a relationship between Syria and Israel might be possible under certain circumstances.''

When I arrived in Tel Aviv from Damascus in January 1990, I was greeted with the news that Senator Bob Dole proposed to cut aid to Israel, Egypt and three other countries by five percent in order to increase aid to Eastern Europe. In response to U.S. and Israeli news media inquiries, I publicly stated my opposition to Senator Dole's proposal, opposition which I later restated in a February 7, 1990 speech to the Senate:

''This is not the time, in the midst of delicate regional negotiations being encouraged by Secretary of State Baker, to withdraw support from our allies. It is the wrong signal to send, especially to Israel, which faces enormous additional costs as a result of a continuing emigration from the Soviet Union.''

During a January 1990 meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, I relayed the news that Asad was willing to attend a conference sponsored only by the U.S. and U.S.S.R. On January 23, 1990, I said on the Senate floor:

''When I was talking to President Asad of Syria, I noted a significant change in his position. For example, on the convening of an international conference where it has been Syria's position that a conference had to be convened by all five permanent members of the United Nations, he now is willing to have the international conference convened by only the United States and Soviet Union.

''When I brought that information to Prime Minister Shamir, he expressed interest because there had been a concern that there would be undue pressure on Israel, and that is another point where President Asad, of Syria, was willing to make a very flat statement that there should not be undue pressure and that the parties should sit down and have the discussions.''

One year later, in October 1991, Syria participated in the Madrid peace conference cosponsored by Washington and Moscow. Although the three days of talks did not yield a peace agreement, the summit marked the first talks between Israel and Syria.

In February 1993 I again traveled to the region. In Israel, I met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and Defense Minister Moshe Arens. I was encouraged on this trip when Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara told me that the presence of United Nations forces on the Golan Heights would be accommodated by Damascus without objection. My hope for Israeli-Syrian agreement was further bolstered by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's reaffirmation of the importance of continuing the bilateral dialogue between Israel and Syria for broader regional peace.

It was not until my sixth visit to Syria, in December 1993, that Asad said his country was ready for a comprehensive peace treaty with Israel. My interest in promoting a comprehensive peace treaty between Israel and Syria was the motivation for each of my trips to Syria.

In 1994, I joined Senator Richard Shelby in introducing an amendment to the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill to condition aid to the PLO on Chairman Arafat's taking concrete steps to curtail terrorism and amending the PLO charter to eliminate the provisions which called for the destruction of Israel. The amendment was adopted by the Congress.

During my August 1995 visit to Israel, Senator Hank Brown and I met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, and President Ezer Weitzman. Prime Minister Rabin said that Israel stood ready to negotiate with Syria, but that the Syrians wanted the U.S. to remain involved as a third party mediator. During this visit I also met with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. As I noted in my trip report:

''Senator Brown and I challenged Chairman Arafat on why he made speeches condemning terrorism in English and not in Arabic. He said his English was not good and made the contention that he had, in fact, made the speeches in Arabic. He continued to make speeches which poison the atmosphere in which both parties seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict. . . . But it seems to me, Mr. President, that Chairman Arafat could do a great deal more than he is doing at the present time to restrain terrorism. I believe that the U.S. Congress, certainly the executive branch but also the Congress, must be alert on this very, very important issue.''

I returned to the region in January 1996 and met with Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Likud leader Netanyahu, and PLO Chairman Arafat. I pressed Chairman Arafat on changing the PLO's Charter, and he promised to do so within two months of reelection later that year. When I again met with Chairman Arafat in August 1996, he had yet to make good on his word.

When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took office following the 1996 elections, he made a public announcement that he would hold Syria responsible for the Hezbollah's attacks in northern Israel. Syria followed by realigning its troops as if to prepare for conflict, drastically raising the threat of direct conflict between Syria's four-million-man army and Israel's smaller but more sophisticated combat force. I was in Jerusalem at the time, and on August 27, 1996 met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who asked me to carry a message to President Hafiz al-Asad stating that he was eager to get to the negotiation table with President Asad. The following day, I traveled to Damascus and met with Asad for three and a half hours. As I reported in my floor statement following the trip:

''I conveyed Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's message that Israel had only peaceful intentions toward Syria, that both sides should move immediately to reduce military tensions, and that Mr. Netanyahu wanted to reopen direct negotiations between Israel and Syria.''

Upon returning to the United States, I met Walid al-Mouallem—then Syrian Ambassador to the United States and now Syria's Foreign Minister—who said that his government viewed my August round of talks between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Asad as having been helpful in deescalating the dangerous situation. As I reported in a floor statement:

''Ambassador al-Mouallem told me that his government viewed my August round of talks between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Asad as having been helpful in deescalating the dangerous tensions. . .and the Ambassador encouraged me to return to the region for another round of meetings

aimed at helping the parties find a basis to reopen their negotiations.''

At the encouragement of Ambassador Walid al-Mouallem and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, I returned to the region three months later, in November 1996. During my November 20 meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he told me that:

''[T]ensions with Syria [have] been reduced since the August/September time period and that he wants to continue to deescalate the saber rattling. He asked me to convey this and specifically that Israel has no aggressive intent against Syria.''

As I further noted in my trip report, Netanyahu also asked me to tell Asad:

''[T]hat [Netanyahu] wishes to [reopen peace talks] as soon as possible and that he is ready, willing, and able to be personally involved in such talks.''

I flew to Damascus following my meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to convey the message to Asad. As I later said on the Senate floor:

''President Asad did generally seem to share Prime Minister Netanyahu's desire to continue to ease and avoid military tensions which could lead to unintended hostilities. Asad received this portion of Prime Minister Netanyahu's message positively and reiterated his own return message to the same effect.''

As I further noted in my Senate speech:

''I came away from this round of meetings convinced that the logjam might be broken, but only with direct action by the President of the United States.''

I returned to the region in December 1997, and as I said before the Senate, I came away from meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Asad with the conviction that:'

''Activist intervention by the President could well bring the Israeli-Syrian tract to a conclusion. As to the Palestinian-Israeli tract, it is much more complicated. But, here again I have urged the President to bring Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Arafat into the same room, at the same time, to hear their complaints and to try to bring a resolution to these very serious problems.''

In December 1998, I traveled with President Clinton to the Middle East to encourage the advancement of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the wake of the accords reached in October of 1998 at Wye Plantation. As I noted following the trip:

''Although somewhat overshadowed by the pending impeachment process, the President's trip was useful, I believe, in applying pressure to the sides to abide by their commitments toward future progress.''

During my August 1999 trip to Israel, I met with Foreign Minister David Levy and Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Prime Minister Barak explained to me that if Israel did not make peace at that time, he was certain that there would be another war in the Middle East. I understood that it was for this reason that he wanted to move forward rapidly with the Wye Accords, despite the political risk.

In January 2000, I traveled to Israel and met with Prime Minister Barak and Mr. Dan Meridor, a member of the Knesset and Chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. Prime Minister Barak and I discussed the recent Syrian-Israeli peace talks. I also joined Major General Uzi Dayan, the Israeli Defense Force Deputy Chief of Staff and cousin of the late Moshe Dayan, in reviewing the Arrow Anti-Missile System, a weapon with a theater ballistic missile defense capability. I understood then that rockets launched by Hezbollah and Hamas pose a major threat to Israel's security. To counter this threat, I have long supported full funding for the Arrow Anti-Missile System, the ''David's Sling'' Weapon System, and the Counter Terrorism Technical Support Working Group. I have helped secure over $1.4 billion for the Arrow Anti-Missile System over the past 19 years.

Syrian President Hafez al-Asad died in June 2000. I was the only member of Congress to attend his funeral. It was a 33-hour trip—15 hours over, 3 hours on the ground, and 15 hours back. I made the trip to pay my respects and to meet the new President, Bashar al-Asad. I found my 9 meetings with President Hafez al-Asad between 1988 and his death in 2000 to be fascinating, very informative and educational for me, and, I think, helpful in promoting better relations between Israel and Syria.

In December 2000, I introduced a bill to prohibit assistance to the Palestinian Authority unless and until the President certified to Congress that the Palestinian Authority had removed the anti-Semitic, anti-Israel content included in textbooks, used in schools, and on radio and television broadcasts made by publicly funded facilities in the Palestinian Authority-controlled areas of the West Bank and Gaza.

In January 2001, I traveled to Israel and met with Prime Minister Barak and Likud leader Ariel Sharon and discussed negotiations with Chairman Arafat. As I recounted on the floor of the Senate:

''Prime Minister Barak stated that the only reason he had not already ended his negotiations with Arafat was to give President Clinton, who had personally invested so much in the negotiations, one last chance to broker peace in the region.''

I returned three months later, in April, and met with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and Minister of Defense Binyamin Eliezer. I described the mood and content of my meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in my subsequent report to the Senate:

''Our meeting was conducted with a backdrop of an escalating conflict. During the previous evening, Israeli planes had bombed a Syrian radar installation in Lebanon in retaliation for the actions of Hezbollah in south Lebanon. I started my conversation with the Prime Minister by noting that the Egyptian Foreign Minister had asked me to talk to Chairman Arafat. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon wasted no time in delivering his message. The policy of the Israeli government would be to draw a distinction between the civilian population and terrorists. . . . He stated that he plans to ease the conditions in the territories. . . . Although Sharon did express some willingness to negotiation, it was clear that in his eyes the plan pushed by President Clinton in his waning days in office, is dead.''

At the time of my March 2002 trip to Israel, the United States was still reeling from the attacks of September 11, 2001. During my visit I met with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and PLO Chairman Arafat. As recorded in my trip report:

''When I saw Chairman Arafat, I conveyed [former US Central Command Commander, General Anthony Zinni's] message that Chairman Arafat ought to make an emphatic, unequivocal statement in Arabic to stop the suicide bombings. Chairman Arafat refused to do that.''

I pursued this issue further, and on October 30, 2003, I held a Labor, Health, Human Services and Education Subcommittee hearing titled ''Palestinian Education: Teaching Peace or War?'' in which the subcommittee examined the Palestinian Authority's role in encouraging Palestinian youth to commit suicide bombings.

During my March 2002 trip I also traveled to Damascus and met with President Bashar al-Asad. As I told the Senate:

''I commented about President Asad's [2001] speech where he equated Naziism with Zionism. I told him that that not only was unacceptable and problematic for the international Jewish community, but for the international community generally. . . . I said equating Zionism and Naziism is very repugnant, that the principal reason for the Jewish action in Israel was the Holocaust and the incarceration of six million Jews, and that kind of equation is unacceptable.''

During my January 2003 trip to the region, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon castigated Syria for harboring terrorist organizations and aiding Hezbollah in Lebanon. I asked Prime Minister Ariel Sharon if he would be willing to enter into peace negotiations with Damascus, brokered by the United States, similar to those which Prime Minister Rabin had participated in in the 1990s. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon acquiesced with the assurances that there would be no preconditions to the talks. Three days later, I passed this message along to President Bashar al-Asad, who responded favorably, saying he was willing to participate in peace talks with Israel. As I noted in The Washington Quarterly:

''He said that he did not think it appropriate to conclude a treaty before Israel and the Palestinian Authority had reached a final settlement but that Syrian-Israeli talks could proceed on a separate track.''

During this trip I also met with former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Attorney General Elyakim Rubenstein, and chief Palestinian Authority negotiator Saeb Erekat, to whom I expressed my opinion of the need for the Chairman to step aside, as I thought it unrealistic to rely on Chairman Arafat in the peace process because of the evidence implicating him in terror.

On November 8, 2005, as Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, I held a hearing titled ''Saudi Arabia: Friend or Foe in the War on Terror,'' to examine the role of the Saudis in allowing illicit financing of terrorist groups, including Palestinian terrorist organizations, from within the kingdom and in disseminating hateful anti-American and anti-Israeli propaganda throughout Islamic schools and mosques in the U.S. In June 2005, and again in November 2007, I introduced legislation calling for full Saudi cooperation in the investigation of terrorist incidents and an end to Saudi support for institutions that fund, train, incite, encourage or aid and abet terrorism.

In December 2005, I traveled to Israel and met with former Prime Minister Ehud Barak and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Peres and I discussed the Palestinian Authority and he said that if Hamas were to win the upcoming elections, it would be a wasted victory because Hamas is a religious based group and has no room for compromise. In an August 2006 visit to Israel I met with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense minister Amir Peretz. Prime Minister Olmert and I discussed Iran, and he emphasized that the international community must realize the threat Iran poses and act to confront it accordingly. As I noted to the Senate following my trip:

''On the question of Hamas, [Prime Minister Olmert] expressed hope that Abu Mazen would exert his authority and garner more control over the territories.''

Defense Minister Peretz and I discussed the conflict with Hezbollah. I said in my trip report:

''Peretz expressed his view that the International Community must examine the rules of war for the UN mission in southern Lebanon as Hezbollah is not a conventional force.''

I concurred, believing that, if there were not a sufficient peacekeeping force on the ground, Hezbollah would have the opportunity to rearm.

In December 2006, I traveled to Israel and met with Prime Minister Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. A major issue of discussion was President Asad's interest in resuming peace negotiations.

During this trip, I traveled to Damascus against explicit objections of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. I considered her objections, but felt that traveling to Syria was necessary in order to keep dialogue open between our nations. I believed that Senators have a role such as the one I was undertaking and the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers gave me ample standing to pursue the course of conduct I thought appropriate. On this occasion, I met extensively for more than an hour with Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem and the next day for a little over an hour with President Bashar al-Asad. President Asad said that he was interested in undertaking peace negotiations with Israel. He said he was obviously looking for a return of the Golan, in return for which he would provide assistance on the fragile truce which Israel then had with Hezbollah.

I pressed President Bashar al-Asad on the obligations Syria had to abide by U.N. Resolution 1701 not to support Hezbollah, and he said Syria would honor that obligation. I, also, pressed him on allowing the U.S. investigation into the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri, and again I received his assurances on that subject. It is always difficult to know the validity of such assurances, but I think the dialogue and the conversation and pressing the point is very worthwhile.

Following my meeting, I wrote to President al-Asad to reiterate previous requests for assistance in determining the fate of Guy Hever, the Israeli soldier who disappeared from the Golan Heights on August 17, 1997. My efforts proved to no avail.

When I later told Prime Minister Olmert about Asad's desire to negotiate, he said Israel would need a ''credible sign'' that Asad is sincere before giving him legitimacy.

In March, 2007, I joined 78 of my Senate colleagues in writing to Secretary Rice to express our support for the principles put forward by the Quartet regarding restrictions on aid to the Palestinian Authority. As proposed by the Quartet, for the Palestinian Authority to receive direct aid, it would have to: recognize Israel's right to exist; renounce violence and terror; and accept previous Israeli/Palestinian agreements. In the letter we expressed disappointment that the Mecca agreement between Hamas and Fatah failed to meet these principles.

In September 2007, I wrote a letter to Secretary Rice stating:

''The essence is that a strong U.S. effort to resolve the differences between Israel and Syria could have a profound effect on changing Syria's provocative/antagonistic activities with Iran, Lebanon, Hezbollah and Hamas.''

In October 2007, I wrote a letter to President Bush urging him to personally participate in the Mideast peace process:

''As you know, I have done considerable work on these issues over the past two decades. . . . I believe that a major U.S. effort to push Israeli-Syrian negotiations could be very productive over the next several months. . . . Minister Barak said that your personal participation in such negotiations at this time could be the causative factor in producing peace in the Mideast.''

My most recent visit to the region came in December 2007. In Israel, I met with Prime Minster Olmert, Foreign Minister Livni, Defense Minister Barak, President Peres, and Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu. Issues discussed included the November 2007 Annapolis Conference, Iran's influence in the region, and what could be gained by engaging Syria to end its support for Hezbollah and Hamas. Regarding the last topic, I said on the Senate floor following my trip:

''But as Prime Minister Olmert commented . . . there are very material advantages which could come if Syria would stop supporting Hamas. It would promote the possibilities of a treaty between Palestinian President Abbas and Israel. If Syria would stop supporting Hezbollah and destabilizing Lebanon, there could be a great advantage. Such a treaty would have the potential of driving a wedge between Syria and Iran which would be of value.''

During this trip, I also met with Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. I again asked President Asad about the fates of Ron Arad and Guy Hever, and was told, as I had been in the past, that they have no knowledge as to what happened to them. I also asked about captured soldiers Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, who had been taken by Hezbollah, and Gilad Shalit, who was being held by Hamas. I later met with Gilad Shalit's father in Washington, to whom I reiterated my pledge to do whatever I could to help secure the return of captured Israeli soldiers or, where they had perished, to obtain their remains.

A major issue of discussion with President Asad and President Abbas was what could now be done to pursue the conclusions of the Annapolis Conference, at which the Joint Israeli-Palestinian Declaration was issued:

''We express our determination to bring an end to bloodshed, suffering and decades of conflict between our peoples; to usher in a new era of peace, based on freedom, security, justice, dignity, respect and mutual recognition; to propagate a culture of peace and nonviolence; to confront terrorism and incitement, whether committed by Palestinians or Israelis.''

In April 2008, I introduced a resolution urging Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to officially abrogate the ten articles in the Fatah Constitution that call for Israel's destruction and terrorism against Israel, that oppose any political solution, and that label Zionism as racism. By striking that language from its constitution, Fatah would be setting an example for the Arab world. It would demonstrate that the Palestinian leadership understands the importance of words and perceptions in the peace process.

The problem of the institutionalization of inflammatory language in the Middle East extends beyond the Fatah Constitution. The Center for Religious Freedom, formerly affiliated with Freedom House, in a 2006 report entitled ''Saudi Arabia's Curriculum of Intolerance,'' stated that despite statements in 2005 by the Saudi Foreign Minister that their educational curricula have been reformed, this is ''simply not the case.'' On the contrary, religious textbooks continue to advocate the destruction of any non-Wahhabi Muslim. Saudi Arabia has established Wahhabism, an extreme form of Islam, as the official state doctrine, and about five million children are instructed each year in Islamic studies using Saudi Ministry of Education textbooks.

My intent in bringing the Fatah Constitution into focus now is not to undermine the Presidency of Mahmoud Abbas. Rather, my intent is to ensure that these problems of perception are addressed now so that all parties can take further steps towards peace.

As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated on October 15, 2007 in Ramallah:

''If you're going to have a two-state solution, you have to accept the right of the other party to exist. If you're going to have a two-state solution that is born of negotiation, you're going to have to renounce violence.''

The purpose of the Fatah Constitution resolution is to urge President Abbas to take action, not only in words, but with deeds, just as I encouraged Chairman Arafat to do over a decade ago.

In addition to securing direct aid for Israel, I have used my position on the Appropriations Committee to urge my colleagues to maintain important Middle East provisions in the appropriations measures, including, but not limited to: the multitude of policy provisions, restrictions, and auditing requirements linked to bilateral assistance to the Palestinians designed to ensure that no portion of the aid is diverted or misused, provisions designed to compel the Palestinian Authority to commit to negotiations with Israel and to fight terror, and provisions to ensure that steps are taken to promote the detection and destruction of smuggling networks and tunnels that lead from Egypt to Gaza.

It is also worth recognizing that the relationship between the United States and Israel is built on more than our shared foreign policy objectives and common defensive goals. Our nations have long benefited from strong business and economic alliances in numerous industries. For example, American public and private institutions engaged in the field of renewable energy research and development are increasingly collaborating with their Israeli counterparts, and I have worked to promote such partnerships.

Congress has demonstrated its recognition of and support for cooperation between the renewable energy industry sectors within the United States and Israel. A Senate resolution passed by the Senate in April 2008 recognizing the 60th anniversary of the independence of the state of Israel cites Israel as being at the forefront of research and development in the field of renewable energy sources. The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 included a provision authorizing funding for grants to Americans and Israelis to encourage collaboration on research, development, and commercialization of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies. This program was originally proposed in legislation introduced by Senator Gordon Smith, the United States-Israel Energy Cooperation Act of 2007, which I supported as a cosponsor.

During full Senate Appropriations Committee consideration of the fiscal year 2009 Energy and Water Appropriations measure, I worked to secure funding for the newly authorized U.S.-Israel Energy Cooperation program. Given the energy crisis in which we find ourselves and the prospect of leveraging Israeli expertise to pursue our renewable energy goals, I introduced an amendment to provide $5 million to fund the U.S.-Israel Energy Cooperation Act. Subcommittee Chairman Dorgan and Ranking Member Domenici agreed to include my amendment in the bill, as reported by the committee. I look forward to working with my colleagues on this important matter as we proceed through the appropriations process.

This statement summarizes some of my efforts to maintain a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, to strengthen Israel as a key strategic partner, and to promote an Israel-Syria peace treaty. Active participation by the Clinton Administration enabled the parties to come very close to an accord in 1995 and 2000. Israel potentially has much to gain if Lebanon is a strong, independent nation without undue Syrian influence or Hezbollah domination. If Syria stopped supporting Hamas, that entity committed to the destruction of Israel, might be sufficiently weakened to enable the Palestinian Authority to negotiate a Peace Treaty with Israel. A corollary benefit could be to drive a wedge between Syria and Iran.

For reasons amplified in my Senate floor statement on June 16, 2006 and my article in The Washington Quarterly's Winter 2006–2007 issue entitled ''Dialogue with Adversaries,'' I am firmly convinced that aggressive diplomacy holds the key to resolving international disputes, including the Mideast peace process, and should be employed by the new Administration.

ATTORNEY GENERAL DESIGNATE ERIC HOLDER

Mr. SPECTER. Madam President, I further sought recognition to comment briefly about the scheduling of the hearing for Attorney General designate Eric Holder.

In looking toward the hearing process, I am looking for a very constructive engagement to determine the qualifications of Mr. Holder. There is no intent on my part or on the part of any of my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle to engage in partisan sniping. As I say, we intend to be constructive and not destructive. We are looking to strengthen the Department of Justice.

The position of Attorney General is an extraordinarily important position. We have seen that during the administration of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, stated candidly, the Department was not well handled. That is a candid statement and also a very mild statement.

During the course of Attorney General Gonzales' tenure, there were so many situations where the Attorney General molded his views to accommodate his appointer, the President of the United States. A great deal that went on in the Department of Justice was partisan and not in the interests of the work of the Department or in the interests of the American people.

We have seen, since 9/11/2001, a vast extension of Executive authority. We found the terrorist surveillance program was initiated by the President without consultation under the tradition of notifying the chairman, which I was during the 109th Congress, or the ranking member. We found there was an engagement with the telephone companies to engage in electronic surveillance, again without notifying the chairman or ranking member of the Judiciary Committee and without notifying the intelligence committees of both Houses, as mandated by law. Further was the expansion of signing statements all during the tenure of the Attorney General.

Without going into the issues of politicization, they were rampant during the tenure of Attorney General Gonzales. I refer to an article, coauthored by the current chairman of the committee and myself, which appeared not too long ago in Politico, on October 28, 2008, where we said in part:

> The Attorney General must be someone who deeply appreciates and respects the work and commitment of the thousands of men and women who work in the branches and divisions of the Justice Department, day in and day out, without regard to politics or ideology, doing their best to enforce the law and promote justice.

With respect to Attorney General designate Holder, there is no doubt he comes to this nomination with an outstanding record, for the most part. Not without question but for the most part. He has an excellent educational background from Columbia: undergrad and law degree, a trial attorney in the Department of Justice, an associate judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, U.S. attorney, Deputy Attorney General, Acting Attorney General—a very distinguished résumé, which I have recited.

But there are questions which have to be inquired into fairly, as already noted in the commentaries of the media on the editorial pages. There has been considerable publicity about the pardon of Marc Rich. There was a case involving Mr. Rich, who was a fugitive, who had given very substantial sums of money to entities connected to the President. The regular procedures for a pardon were bypassed. The Department of Justice was not consulted. The attorneys in the Southern District of New York, which was handling the Rich case, were opposed to the pardon.

From my own days as district attorney of Philadelphia, where I dealt with celebrated cases involving people who were fugitives, who had fled, that is about as serious a matter as you could find and hardly one where there would be an expectation of leniency or pardon to wipe out the charge, eliminate the matter, while the defendant was in absentia.

There was an extensive report filed on this issue by the House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform, the 107th Congress, second session. It is available for anyone to read. There are quite a number of very serious questions involving what happened with Mr. Holder and the people involved there.

The concern that arises is why Mr. Holder lent the recommendation, which has been characterized as neutral leaning in favor, in this context. I come to no conclusions on the matter. I approach this matter, as I try to approach all matters, with an open mind. But in an extensive interview with Mr. Holder he has presented his views. I don't think it is useful to get into the specifics as to the precise concerns which I raised and his precise answers. Let that await a day where we have a hearing and where Mr. Holder is in a position to speak for himself. But by analogy to the Gonzales tenure, I think it is imperative we be sure the Attorney General of the United States does not bend his views to accommodate his appointer; that the Attorney General does not bend his views in any way which is partisan or political, to serve any interest other than the interests of justice.

As noted in the article cited in Politico, where you have the professionals in the Department of Justice, they wouldn't even meet with attorneys for Mr. Rich, they thought it was such an open-and-shut case, and were opposed—at least according to information provided. This is all to be brought out at a hearing. But to run counter to the views of the professionals is a major red flag which has to be inquired into and inquired into with some depth.

Then we have the situation where Attorney General Reno recused herself on the issue of appointing an independent counsel to investigate alleged—and I emphasize alleged—illegal fundraising by Vice President Albert Gore out of the White House. There was the relatively notorious incident where the Vice President was at a meeting and drank a lot of ice tea and absented himself from certain parts of the meeting where he was not able to—or had a rationale for not knowing certain things.

I questioned Attorney General Reno in detail about that during Judiciary Committee hearings and she said: Well, there just wasn't sufficient evidence.

She had disregarded a document, a note taken by someone present, because, as she said, it did not refresh that witness's recollection.

I asked her about the doctrine of prior recollection recorded, which is a well-known exception to the hearsay rule. She denied knowing about it.

I note a frown on the face of the Presiding Officer, who is a distinguished district attorney herself. Doubtless we could speak at length about prior recollection recorded. I mention that because of the curious circumstances of what happened there. There we had an assistant U.S. attorney named LaBella, who was asked to take on the job of making a recommendation. According to the information provided to me, he made a recommendation for an independent counsel and the professionals in the Department asked for an independent counsel, and it was overruled.

I am not going to comment about Mr. Holder's role. Let him respond to that and let us take that up in due course. But here again is a potential situation where the interests of justice and objectivity were not followed in the highest levels of the Department of Justice when Mr. Holder was in charge, with the Attorney General, Attorney General Reno, having recused herself.

There are many other matters which warrant inquiry, and I will not take the time to go into them now. They are