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NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Many of us thought we would never live to see today's headlines proclaiming peace between Israelis and Palestinians. And while there were many indications over the past week that peace was at hand, it was still remarkable to read the text of Yasir Arafat's letter to Prime Minister Rabin stating that the P.L.O. recognizes Israel's right to exist in peace and security and that the P.L.O. renounces the use of terrorism. And, it was just as remarkable to read Prime Minister Rabin's letter stating that the government of Israel recognizes the P.L.O.

While the achievement of this peace accord at first glance appears so sudden, if we look back at developments over the past two or three years, we can see more clearly why this peace agreement was achievable at this point in time.

Starting with the Gulf War, the dynamics in the Middle East changed significantly. The United States, under the strong leadership of President Bush, spearheaded a multinational coalition against Iraq which included most of the Arab countries. This U.S. led coalition successfully rolled back Saddam Hussein's forces. However, the coalition was not supported by the P.L.O., nor by Jordan. And so, when the war ended, the P.L.O. and Jordan were left standing alone, cut-off from the Gulf states who had provided substantial financial support over the years.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union only months later, the P.L.O. lost another patron.

These two developments created the ideal conditions for the onset of negotiations between Israel and its neighbors. President Bush launched the diplomatic initiative to seek a Middle East peace in March of 1991, and brought the Russians on board to support the negotiating process in Madrid in October of 1991. The pursuit of peace in the Middle East remained one of Secretary Baker's top priorities until his departure.

Upon assuming office, the Clinton Administration wisely continued the U.S. role established under the Bush Administration -- that of facilitating the peace process.

But, as we have learned in recent days, the Norwegian government was the key intermediary in the secret negotiations which have led to this particular accord.

In my view this Israeli-Palestinian peace pact was made possible because of a number of factors: the success of the Gulf War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. leadership in the Middle East, the active participation of the Norwegian government, and last, but not least, the commitment of the Israeli government and Palestinian leaders to breaking the cycle of violence and laying the foundation for a genuine peace.

The peace accord will be signed on Monday, but that alone will not bring peace. There are still extremists on both sides who oppose peace -- those who want more Israel and those who want no Israel. Nevertheless, I believe that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians desire peace and recognize the benefits peace will bring. And, so I encourage the Israelis and their leaders, and the Palestinians and their leaders, to stay the course. The U.S. government and the American people support this accord. I hope that it will be the first step toward a broader Middle East peace.

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Remarks delivered on the Senate floor, approximately 5:27 PM.