

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 10, 1991

Dear Senator Dole:

Since the end of the Gulf war, we have worked hard to take advantage of the potentially historic opportunity to move the Arab/Israeli peace process forward. Over the past six months, we have achieved a great deal -- fashioning a process that for the first time would launch direct negotiations between Israel, Palestinians from the Territories, and all of Israel's neighbors. Next week, Jim Baker will be returning to the region for what I hope will be a final effort to nail down the modalities for a peace conference and the direct negotiations that will follow.

This effort on our part does not take place in a vacuum. Over the past two years, Israel has opened its doors to more than 300,000 Soviet and Ethiopian immigrants. The steady influx of men, women, and children from around the world over past decades has been central to Israel's success. The United States has long supported immigration to Israel. I have been pleased to play a role in this enterprise. It is no exaggeration to state that many of the Soviet and Ethiopian Jews now in Israel would not be free and safe were it not for years of sustained U.S. effort -- an effort supported by both Republicans and Democrats and by Congress and the Executive alike.

Earlier this spring, the Administration came to agreement with Congress and the Government of Israel on the provision of emergency supplemental economic assistance to Israel. In turn, Israel and its supporters agreed to defer a request for additional absorption assistance

until September. Now we find ourselves on the verge of historic direct negotiations, possibly as early as October.

On both sides of the conflict, absorption assistance is a very important and very complex issue. I am deeply concerned that if we address Israeli absorption guarantees now -- on the eve of the conference -- we could divert attention and momentum from our efforts to get the parties together for these historic negotiations.

At the moment, we are involved in extremely sensitive negotiations to pin down the final details related to convening the conference. What we must avoid is anything that would distract the parties from the hard choices and decisions they have yet to make to get to the negotiating table.

It is our judgment that if we address absorption assistance now we risk losing everything we have been working on for the past six months. An issue of this sensitivity could be seized upon by rejectionists intent on thwarting negotiations. If Congress chooses to press forward now, we stand a very real chance of losing the participation of either our Arab or Israeli negotiating partners. The best chance to promote Arab/Israeli peace since the Camp David Accords will be lost, with uncertain and potentially dangerous consequences in the region.

Postponement will afford us an opportunity to study Israel's needs in greater detail and to craft a program which has the greatest likelihood of promoting successful absorption at minimal taxpayer cost while contributing to prospects for peace. We will ensure that an appropriate legislative vehicle is made available to address the absorption assistance issue in January.

Next week Secretary Baker will meet with Israeli Prime Minister Shamir and a number of Arab leaders. He will assure all these leaders of

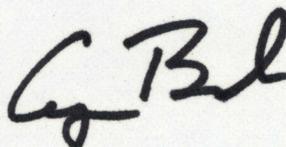
3

unequivocal U.S. support for Soviet Jewish immigration and absorption in Israel. But I want him also to be in a position to report to them that, in the interests of advancing the cause of peace in the Middle East, the Administration and the Congress -- with the support of the bipartisan leadership of both Houses -- have agreed to defer consideration of Israeli absorption assistance until January.

Armed with such a commitment, he will have the flexibility he needs to try and nail down remaining modalities for the peace talks. Absent such a deferral, the attention of all the parties could well be diverted from the key choices they have yet to make in getting to the negotiating table. The result could well be the loss of the peace process.

Providing a pause is the single most important step Congress could take to get these historic peace negotiations launched. We have an excellent record of cooperation on Arab/Israeli issues. Won't you please support me now in a 120-day pause for peace?

Sincerely,



The Honorable Robert Dole
Republican Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510