

**Statement by United States Security Coordinator
Lieutenant General Keith W. Dayton**

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

March 15, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to address the committee today.

It is quite clear that the “Post-election Challenges in the Middle East” include quite a few related to security. January’s PLC elections will have significant consequences for the security sector, although at this point we have only a limited sense of how they will play out.

It is common knowledge that the Palestinian Authority security forces, as currently constituted, are Fatah dominated. Before elections, the level of activity and performance of the Palestinian leadership and security forces in confronting terrorists, collecting weapons, dismantling terrorist organizations, and consolidating and right-sizing the security sector was disappointing. There *had* been sporadic, localized, internal PA security cooperation. However, such cooperation was not the norm and tended to evaporate quickly due to the PA’s internal political crisis.

There were some bright spots. Israel’s courageous Gaza disengagement initiative went forward in a secure environment and with a great deal of on-the-ground coordination between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Palestinian Authority security forces (PASF). The international crossing at Rafah opened in late November under carefully negotiated security arrangements and with the essential support of the EU’s Border Assistance Mission. And, despite an uptick in lawlessness and numerous warnings of violence prior to election day, the Palestinian legislative elections went forward in a safe and secure environment.

In addition, fears of post-election Palestinian violence have not, so far, been borne out. Under the caretaker government, the security services remain more or less in place while the victors and the opposition sort out the political arrangements. On the ground, we see continuing examples of local cooperation between the Israeli Defense Forces and Palestinian Security Forces as they deal with the necessities of daily life. In other words, caution and deliberation seem to be prevailing, at least for the moment. My team and I continue to work with the

parties and key regional actors to support that stability so that the political and diplomatic levels have time and opportunity to do their work.

At this point in time, with Palestinian politics in a very fluid state, I can offer no certainty about the future course of events regarding Palestinian security forces. An internal debate is raging within Fatah as to their future, and the jury is still out. Likewise, the role Hamas may play in the future Palestinian security sector is far from settled. In short, the Palestinian leadership – Fatah, Hamas, and others – are themselves, on a daily basis, seeking to sort out their relationships to one another and their short-term and long-term goals, as well as the options that they have to advance those objectives. They are doing all this with an eye to the regional and international context and how it impacts their relationships with outside actors – especially Israel. And, as I mentioned above, caution has prevailed so far.

With this in mind, we are of course following suit with the other arms of the U.S. Government in carefully reviewing our program and approach. Before the elections, USSC support for the PASF focused on advice and guidance to support their own efforts at reform, while playing a coordinating role with the other prospective security donors. We also had an active role in following up on the November 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, including the EU's work to resolve concerns and complaints about the operations at Rafah. Since the elections our focus has been on frequent and direct coordination between the IDF and Palestinian security forces, including on such issues as the Gaza border crossings, and continuous liaison with the Palestinian and Israeli security leadership.

The future is obviously an open question. But a few things are not. First and foremost is the USSC's strict adherence to the US policy of no contact with and no support of any kind for Hamas. Second is the recognition that Palestinian security sector reform and performance is an important element for progress in accordance with the Roadmap, and is essential for a viable two state solution. And third, it remains in America's national interests to stay engaged in the Palestinian-Israeli situation, a fact that has been made even more critical by the Hamas victory. The question, I think, is how.

For reasons of both law and policy, we cannot and will not work with a Hamas – whether in or out of government – that refuses to accept the Quartet conditions of disavowing violence and terror, recognizing Israel, and accepting previous obligations and agreements between the parties. And, while the Palestinian Authority Presidency might continue to maintain its authority over

some, or perhaps even all, of the PASF, it is a very complicated legal and policy question of whether we could continue to work with those elements. My team is studying the options and working in close consultation with our diplomatic missions in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, with Israel and key regional and international actors, and of course with the policy level in Washington as to where we go next.

Even should we be unable to work with official Palestinian institutions, we do have some ideas as to how potentially to work with non-governmental actors to shape the environment for a better future. The majority of Palestinians, Israelis, and the international community continue to aspire to the two-state solution, and that a future state of Palestine would need effective security forces. Working with Palestinian civil society – on ideas related to national security strategy, demobilization of militias, and the inculcation of democratic, civilian governance of security forces – could be one direction. Similarly, it is worth considering, if not with the PA itself than in conjunction with Palestinian civil society, what the security architecture of a future Palestinian state *should* look like. That state will need a new plan for the Palestinian security sector, one that sweeps away the Arafat-era structure and replaces it with an architecture of forces appropriate for a political entity its size; an entity that would be committed to non-confrontation with Israel and towards a proper role of protecting Palestinian civilians and preventing terror. And we need to be ready to implement these plans if circumstances create an opportunity.

Regardless of what we can do now or in the near future on the subject of PA security sector reform, importantly, the USSC team will continue to monitor and advise on Israeli-Palestinian security coordination, an important component of the Roadmap and crucial to maintaining any hope of avoiding a major humanitarian disaster. The issue of operations at the Karni crossing between Israel and Gaza, for example, or the ongoing efforts to improve the operations at Rafah, will continue to require the engagement of a trusted interlocutor with security expertise.

We are clearly at a crossroads, but the path forward is unclear. More than six weeks after the Palestinian parliamentary elections, we are in a period of unprecedented uncertainty both in the Palestinian Authority and in Israel, and this directly impacts on the future of security reform. I have noted the internal debate in Fatah over the future of the existing security forces, and there is of course the closely watched process of Palestinian government formation. We should also keep in mind that Israel is approaching its own parliamentary elections, and, while there is unity on the approach to Hamas itself, it may not be until May that Israeli

policy is solidified on how it deals with the non-Hamas parts of Palestinian society. And we will continue to consult closely with our Quartet and regional partners, and the Israeli Government, as we proceed together.

In closing, I want to emphasize one final point. Let's remember why the United States, through the agent of the USSC, is so visibly involved in the region. It is not altruism, and it is not because we have nothing else to do. We are here because it remains profoundly in the US national security interest for us to be involved in the search for peace and progress towards the two-state vision. The Hamas victory has not changed that. What happens in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza has a direct impact on the immediate neighbors of Jordan and Egypt and US strategic interests there. Likewise, what happens in the Israel-Palestinian situation has profound implications for the rest of this difficult neighborhood.

The Israelis, Palestinians, and our Quartet partners all look to the United States for leadership in the area of Palestinian security. The election of Hamas to the PLC makes the task enormously difficult. But there is a stabilizing element of maintaining our presence in the region while the situation remains fluid, and there may be other opportunities once the situation becomes more clear. But we must have a capable partner, committed to peace. Hamas' failure to date to accept the principles established by the Quartet halts our ability to make any progress, and the decisions taken by a Hamas-run PA government may derail our efforts. But while we must now clearly wait to see how the situation unfolds, I encourage us all to be cautious before we rush to the conclusion that the effort is not worth it. Security sector reform remains fundamental to achieving a Palestinian state at peace with its neighbors and responsive to the needs of its people at home, and that is in America's interests. I encourage us all to be cautious before we conclude that the effort is not worth it.

Thank you, and I will be happy to take your questions.