

Sec. Hillary Clinton's comment to a reporters question on the Gaza incident

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, I'd like to ask you a couple things about the Israeli situation which, as you know, is getting more and more serious by the day. I know there are many unknowns at this point, but do you accept Israel's argument of self-defense? And do you think that the investigation should be done by Israel or by a third independent party, as other Security Council members have said? And more broadly, we all know there are so many moving pieces to this. There's Turkey, there's Israel and the Palestinians, there's Iran, there's Syria. What are the implications in your mind of this situation to the peace process and in the larger issues in the Middle East? Thanks.

SECRETARY CLINTON: You have asked a very complicated set of interrelated questions. And let me put it into context as I respond. First, let me say how deeply we regret the tragic loss of life and injuries suffered among those involved in the incident aboard the Gaza-bound ships, and we offer our condolences to the families of the deceased and the wounded. Turkey and Israel are both good friends of the United States, and we are working with both to deal with the aftermath of this tragic incident. The United States supports the Security Council's condemnation of the acts leading to this tragedy. And we urge Israel to permit full consular access to the individuals involved and to allow the countries concerned to retrieve their deceased and wounded immediately. We urge all concerned countries to work together to resolve the status of those who were part of this incident as soon as possible.

We support in the strongest terms the Security Council's call for a prompt, impartial, credible, and transparent investigation. We support an Israeli investigation that meets those criteria. We are open to different ways of assuring a credible investigation, including international participation, and we will continue to discuss these ideas with the Israelis and our international partners in the days ahead. The situation in Gaza is unsustainable and unacceptable. Israel's legitimate security needs must be met, just as the Palestinians' legitimate needs for sustained humanitarian assistance and regular access for reconstruction materials must also be assured. We will continue to work closely with the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority along with international NGOs and the United Nations to ensure adequate access for humanitarian goods, including reconstruction and building supplies. And we welcome efforts to promote the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate and internationally recognized Palestinian Authority. Ultimately, the solution to this conflict must be found through an agreement based on a two-state solution negotiated between the parties. This incident underscores the urgency of reaching this goal and we remain committed to working with both sides to move forward these negotiations.

I think the situation from our perspective is very difficult and requires careful, thoughtful responses from all concerned. But we fully support the Security Council's action last night in issuing a presidential statement and we will work to implement the intention that this presidential statement represents.