

Congressman Pence: "Let me call to your attention today's Associated Press story that reads, 'October is on course to record the second consecutive decline in US military and Iraqi civilian deaths in a row. American commanders say they know why the US troop increase and an Iraqi ground swell against Al-Qaeda and Shiite militia extremists' is the cause.

"Thank you for your diplomatic work on the ground in Iraq. Thank you for the progress that it's making; reported or unreported.

"I want to speak to you about Annapolis and get your sense of things. I admire your statement earlier that the objective is a secure and stable peace in the region that the President said that was preconditioned on the 'nonnegotiable demands of human dignity.'

"As an unapologetic champion of Israel, let me say I am very interested to know, going into Annapolis, what the substance of that means. Specifically, you may recall, I think it was a week after September the 11th when the word of the creation of a Palestinian state was first rumored in the newspapers.

"We met shortly thereafter on Capitol Hill to speak about it in your prior role. What was a rumor a week after 9/11 has been reported to be the stated objective of Administration policy. I heard it driving in this morning that the goal of Annapolis is to create a Palestinian State.

"I am troubled by that. Shouldn't the goal, first and foremost, be a secure, stable, and permanent state of Israel, as a Jewish state? And then adjust settlement for the other people in the region?

"Israel is our ally. America was instrumental in a rebirth in 1948. I would just ask you, very sincerely, because I think I know your heart on this, I think I know the President's heart, I don't question that at all. But do we put ourselves tactically at a disadvantage when we state that the objective of these negotiations is the establishment of a Palestinian state as opposed to saying the objective is the cessation of violence, the objective is that all parties would recognize the right of each party to exist, the objective is a humane solution.

And then if that leads us to the creation of a Palestinian State, then so be it?

“I’d love to know what your definition of success is. Can you speak specifically to those reported accounts that the objective of this conference is the creation of a Palestinian state, and what your mentality and the President’s is, going into this conference?”

Secretary Rice: “Thank you. First Congressman, let me just note, you mentioned September 11th and I think that after September 11th, one way that the United States and the Israeli leadership actually got closer was in our joint belief that terrorism was a significant, indeed existential threat, not just to Israel but also the United States

“The President made very clear early on that you could not, with the one hand, condemn Al Qaeda and on the other hand hug Hamas. It was the President who said in effect that there could be no such thing as a freedom fighter in that context.

“This was that a Palestinian State could not be born of terror. It is why we rejected the leadership of Yasir Arafat. It is why the President then called for a Democratic leadership in the Palestinian territories to lead their people to statehood.

“You now have, in the Palestinian territories, a democratic leadership, and one that we believe is really trying to fight terror. They don’t have all the capability they need, but one of the things that was very encouraging for me when I was in the region recently is there isn’t much argument that these are people who want to do the right thing.

“So I think the circumstances have changed very much. I would say that the conference will try to lay a foundation for the parties to come to the establishment of Palestinian State. Perhaps it was put best by Ariel Sharon, what he talked about in his Herzliya speech, the need to divide the land, and the need to make painful compromises because a Palestinian state was in Israel’s interest.

“I think that what people have come to recognize, is that the way that you will ultimately secure a democratic Jewish state called Israel is to have, living side by side in peace, a Palestinian democratic state.

“So the goal is the establishment of a Palestinian state. Not one born of terror as I think it would have been in earlier times. Not one that is unable to carry out its security responsibilities. Not one that is not democratic and delivering for its people.

“I would defend the statement that there needs to be the establishment of a Palestinian state in order for there to be, in the long run, a stable and secure Jewish state. I think that was the reason that the father of the settlement movement, Ariel Sharon, moved from the concept of a greater Israel to the concept of dividing the land and having two states, one for Palestinian people and one for the Israeli people.”