

## Qatar seen as key to Gaza peace talks

by UPI

JERUSALEM -- Palestinian officials on the sidelines of the U.S. diplomatic visit to the Mideast said the Gulf state of Qatar can influence the escalating conflict in Gaza. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited with Palestinian Authority and Israeli officials in Jerusalem Wednesday and said talks would resume on moving the peace process forward, CNN said. Unnamed Palestinian Authority officials told The Washington Times that oil-rich Qatar -- as financier of Hamas -- occupies a unique position in the peace process due to its regional influence and its financial and political support of Hamas. "Qatar gives Hamas millions of dollars a month (on average)," a senior PA official said. "They say the money is for the people of Gaza, but Hamas steals it, and some of it may be used to buy weapons." Another source said Qatar offered to broker a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel on several occasions. U.S. delegates are aware of Qatar's influence, however, and don't need the Palestinians to tell them that, the Times said.

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