



Answering Difficult Questions

1. Bush tried to push for peace since the Annapolis Conference and Condoleezza Rice has been really involved as well. If President Bush failed why do we think President Obama could succeed?

For the most part, Bush announced policies he would like to see and then stepped to the sidelines hoping that his wishes would come true. There were no mechanisms for follow through. The U.S. must be fully engaged in Middle East diplomacy in order to make true gains. By the time Condoleezza Rice made a concerted effort in November 2007, Bush's credibility in the Middle East was seriously hurt. He was certainly not trusted by the Arab world. Barack Hussein Obama has a fresh start to build credibility with the Arab world. He is trusted by pro-peace leaders on both sides of the conflict and now is the time for him to use his leverage to help both Israeli and Palestinian realize their dreams of peace and security.

2. Palestinians don't want two states. They hold on to the dream of right of return.

It is untrue that the majority of Palestinians do not want two states. While it is a hard peace to swallow for both sides, it is necessary to have two states so that both peoples' calls for self-determination can be answered. It is the radicals on both sides that sabotage peace. There are religious extremists on both sides who each believe that God has given them the right, nay the mission, to wipe a people away in the name of their own nation building.

Like most people, Palestinians want to live a decent life. If the two-state solution is a real possibility, and Palestinians appear to have opportunities for a bright future, the majority will choose this path. This conflict is between moderates and extremists on both sides and if the moderate majority is outlining a bright and hopeful future, then they will surely defeat those peddling visions of death and destruction.

3. Don't we need to deal with the Iranian threat?

A stabilized two-state solution and a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace will help deal with the Iranian threat more than any other option. If Israel has an opportunity to build normal relations with the 22 other Arab countries, they can work cooperatively to deal with the Iranian nuclear threat. A nuclear Shi'ite Iran is just as worrisome to the Sunni Arab states as it is to Israel and they should be working together to deal with this threat.

Also, the ongoing occupation is the basis for much of Ahmadinejad's rhetoric that makes him popular within Iran and throughout the Middle East. We know that Ahmadinejad uses harsh rhetoric against Israel as a way to distract his population from their own economic and social unrest, and as we saw in the previous Iranian "election," there is already an organic movement of Iranians demanding that their country move in a different direction. Their voices were brutally suppressed and Ahmadinejad remains in power. But make no mistake, the movement for change in Iran is far from being over and the last thing that movement needs is a push from folks who believe in war before diplomacy. There may indeed be a time

in the future that a military response will be necessary, we're not so naïve to believe otherwise. However, if that is done prematurely, it will only strengthen Ahmadinejad and his cronies, increasing their intransigence with the international community and giving him a successful rallying cry at home.

4. Abbas is not a strong leader; he can't even control his own people. Why would we think the Palestinian population would actually agree to a negotiated two-state solution?

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas remains the elected President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the PLO. In that role, he will continue to be key negotiator on behalf of the Palestinians. Hamas has even agreed to grant him this authority. Therefore negotiations with Abbas do officially represent the entire country.

One of the best ways to improve Abbas' standing with the Palestinian people is to actually improve the quality of life for Palestinians as a result of negotiations. If the peace process can actually produce results, like a settlement freeze and greater freedom of movement, support for the peace process will actually increase. One of the reasons many Palestinians did not support the Oslo Accords is that they occurred while the Palestinians simultaneously saw an enormous settlement expansion. If the reverse were true, we would likely see greater support.

Finally, Hamas does represent a large portion of Palestinian society and if a unity government is achieved, negotiating with this government should not be taken off the table as an option. Given the complete failure of the policy to isolate Hamas and boycott the previous unity government, a new approach to a Palestinian unity government will be absolutely critical to Israel's security and the future of the peace process.

This being said, we agree that we need to build support from the bottom up and top down at the same time. J Street U and the entire pro-peace movement stands in support of the many organizations within Palestinian civil society who are working to achieve this goal of two states for two peoples.

5. Will Israel be secure if we aren't in power in the West Bank? Look what happened when we left Gaza.

While we support disengaging from the West Bank it must be done in an appropriate way. Israel unilaterally disengaged from Gaza even though Abbas requested negotiations. Bush and Ariel Sharon ignored that request. As a result, it appeared that Israel was rewarding violence by pulling out as opposed to rewarding negotiations. Therefore, when Israel pulled out of Gaza and left a power vacuum it was easy for Hamas to quickly fill it. A similar situation occurred when Israel disengaged from Lebanon. When a negotiated disengagement takes place Israel will be guaranteed security through one mechanism or another, either through international peacekeepers or joint security measures. Just look back to the Israeli disengagement from the Sinai Peninsula. It was a gradual process, done with significant international support, collaboration and oversight and did not leave a power vacuum that allowed nefarious elements to torpedo the process.

6. Doesn't President Obama have more pressing matters to tend to here at home? Shouldn't we focus on Health Care? Can't this wait?

Certainly domestic policy concerns are paramount. But as then President-Elect Obama said himself during the campaign, he has to be able to focus on more than one thing at a time as President.

Finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict doesn't cost much financially, it just takes political courage and the kind of once-in-a-generation window of opportunity that now exists for peace to become a reality. It costs more financially to continue the ongoing occupation than to find a peaceful solution. It continues to be a drain on Israeli and U.S. resources. There are huge military costs and the Palestinian economy continues to be hamstrung by the ongoing occupation.

The benefits of a sustainable solution far outweigh the costs. It is a key step toward stabilizing the entire Middle East and a concrete way to rebuild American credibility so desperately needed in this part of the world.

7. Is this a smart thing for a new president to do in his first year on the job? We want President-Elect Obama to get re-elected after all!

Polls consistently show that the majority of American Jews support a two-state solution. If the administration engaged in effective Middle East diplomacy, and made concrete gains, Obama would maintain support among this constituency, not lose it. The alternative, waiting to engage and possibility losing the opportunity for two states, is far more threatening to those concerned about Israel's future and our next election. In addition, the peace movement of which we are a part is quickly gaining strength with J Street U's well-resourced campus programs as well as the J Street family in Washington. We are better organized than we have ever been and now is the time to step up and give President Obama and our newly elected representatives on Capitol Hill the political support they need to have the courage to make peace.

8. History shows that American intervention in the peace process does more harm than good.

This notion is absolutely wrong. While the U.S. has indeed been responsible for some shady business in the Middle East, when it comes to the peace process, there are reasons why all of the parties have agreed to sign the final agreements on the ceremonies on the White House lawn.

No advances in the peace process have ever happened without U.S. involvement. From peace with Egypt, to Jordan to the Oslo Accords, the U.S. has always played a critical role in advancing peace. It can offer carrots and sticks and give the parties incentives to make peace, i.e. Foreign aid and lucrative trade deals that no other country on earth can match. A great man once said "with great power comes great responsibility," and it is the fortunate or unfortunate role that we have – that U.S. involvement in the peace process is what will make or break any hope for peace and security for the entire Middle East.

11. There are about 30 other pressing conflicts throughout the world that need our attention a great deal more than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Peace is nice, but what does it have to do with our national security?

Israeli-Palestinian peace and a comprehensive resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict is an important step toward stabilizing the entire Middle East. Solving this conflict will not serve as a panacea for all of the

region's deep problems, but it will be impossible to build a stable Middle East while this conflict still festers.

12. Why will this be any different than Camp David II?

There are many reasons why Camp David II failed and blame could fall equally on Clinton, Barak and Arafat. It is unfair to put the blame solely on Arafat's shoulders as several pundits have declared.

While many folks make the argument that Arafat was offered 97% of the West and rejected the offer, it is unfair to lay the blame solely on his shoulders as several reputable sources acknowledge that the solution put forth was not sustainable. Barak oversaw one of the biggest eras of settlement expansion since 1967, so it's no wonder those talks were doomed. Arafat's actions over the years have certainly been deeply reprehensible and worse, but that does not put Israel in the right.

Regardless, much has changed since Camp David II, from the second intifada to 9/11 to the Lebanon and Gaza wars, and Israelis, Palestinians and Americans have all learned the dangers associated with a lack of peace.

13. Why are you doing this now? Can't this wait until other more pressing concerns are taken care of?

The truth is that this cannot wait any longer. We need to hold the President accountable, we need to push him to do what he promised, and our support is critical in giving him the political support that he needs to make courageous moves for peace.

"As president, I will work to help Israel achieve the goal of two states, a Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security. And I won't wait until the waning days of my presidency. I will take an active role, and make a personal commitment to do all I can to advance the cause of peace from the start of my administration."

-Barack Obama, June 4, 2008