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Democratic Caucus Townhall Meetings

Welcome

Israel Working Group Town Hall

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Like you, we are deeply concerned about the safety and security of the state of Israel, especially in these dangerous and volatile times. For this reason, we will be holding an open Online Town Hall so that you can ask us questions about your concerns in the Middle East and about the Democratic platform on the US-Israel relationship.

To submit a question in advance, [click here](#). Check back on **Friday, October 27, 2006 at 12:00 pm EDT**, to virtually meet with us at our Online Town Hall site. If you are unable to participate at that time, check back after October 27 to read the complete transcript.

Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi

Rep. Steve Israel

Rep. Henry Waxman, Co-chair Democratic Israel Working Group

Rep. Alcee Hastings, Co-chair Democratic Israel Working Group

Rep. Linda Sanchez, Co-chair Democratic Israel Working Group

Rep. Gene Green, Co-chair Democratic Israel Working Group

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negotiations between Israel and Syria? Would it support the Bush approach of preventing Israel from negotiating until Syria changes its attitude on issues concerning the US or would it encourage Israel to explore chances of peace with Syria?

- Adam from Chicago asks: With North Korea's belligerent attitude and its potential ties to terrorist organizations, what effect could a nuclear North Korea have on the Middle East?
- Barry from Encino, CA writes: What are your views on the current debate in Europe about how Muslims fit into society and what are the implications in America?
- Debbie from Newton, MA asks: I went on vacation to France a couple of years ago, and it seems that the Jewish community is getting smaller and smaller, moving to Israel and Canada. What can we do about European anti-Semitism?
- Talia from Las Vegas, NV asks: What is the Democratic platform on energy independence? I think that one of the biggest national security dangers to Israel and America is the reliance on foreign oil.
- Lori from Maplewood, NJ asks: I'm concerned that Democrats care too much about America's appearance throughout the world and will do anything to be better liked, including compromising America's interests.
- Carrie from Atlanta, GA asks: Do you believe that the president will take military action against Iran before he leaves office? Do you believe that Israel has those capabilities and the will to do it?
- Hannah from Hancock Park, CA asks: What is your stance on pressuring Israel to make a deal with the Palestinians, especially Hamas, who are proud of killing Israelis?
- Eric from Dallas, TX asks: What are the reasons America's youth should support a strong Israel while demoralizing attitudes and statements from leaders such as President Carter are extensive and a situation on the ground exists where peace does not seem imminent?
- Rita from South Florida writes: Approximately 850,000 Jews were displaced from Arab countries after the State of Israel was created in 1948 and never received refugee status. Many Jews were persecuted and suffered humiliation, human rights violations and expulsion from the countries of their birthplace. What can we do to address this? Jews are refugees too!
- Gary from Riverdale, NY asks: I think that this is great that you are all doing this, but many members of my community, myself included, are afraid of committee chairmanships getting into the wrong hands, i.e. anti-Israel hands, should the Democrats take back the house. Is there truth to the rumors?
- Yitzhak from Rockville, MD asks: Ms. Pelosi, in 2005 you declared that "For too long, leaders of both political parties in the United States have not done nearly enough to confront the Russians and the Chinese, who have supplied Iran as it has plowed ahead with its nuclear and missile technology". What are you intend to do as The Speaker to resolve the problem?
- Susie from Bloomington, IN writes: If the Democrats capture the House, how will our approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict differ from the Administration's present "do not get involved" course? Do you see the Democrats taking a more pro-active approach?
- Michael from Long Island asks: What are your views on the Feinstein-Leahy amendment to FY07 Defense Authorization to prohibit the Pentagon from using or selling cluster bombs unless they can ensure that they will not be used in or near any concentrated population of civilians.
- Roger from Lakewood, NJ asks: How can you disengage from Iraq and still maintain a stable middle east? If Iraq is left to its own the strongest backed element wins, and the whole mid-east is radicalized, what then? We can not afford that outcome- what are the Dems plans????
- Karen from Leawood, KS asks: Do you support or oppose the US/Israel ratifying the ICC treaty?
- Yaacov from Brooklyn, NY asks: After Republicans got caught accepting vacations from lobbyists, it seemed that Representatives stopped taking trips. But, trips to Israel are different. Do you believe that educational Congressional trips that are privately funded should be banned?
- Jack from Shaker Heights, OH asks: What are your views on the House resolution in July of 2006, in the midst of Israel's war with Hezbollah?
- Alon from Silver Spring, MD asks: I am very concerned about the deteriorating level of support for Israel among rank and file Democrats. All polls show that support for Israel is much stronger among Republicans than Democrats and that Democratic voters show much less understanding for Israel's defensive military actions. Democratic voters also seem much less determined to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and seem too force averse on that issue. In addition, there is a wide spread perception that the pro-Israel lobby was behind the war in Iraq. How does the Democratic leadership plan to educate its rank and file members regarding the need to support Israel in its war on terrorism?

- David from Boston asks: The spread of nuclear weapons is terrifying in this day in age, but are non-proliferation treaties the answer?
- Liron from Madison, WI asks: While I believe in the United States cooperating with other nations on international issues, I'm concerned about the UN's bias against Israel. Do you agree or disagree?
- William from Chicago, IL asks: In May, there was a new law passed by the Iranian parliament that would require the country's Jews and Christians to wear colored badges to identify them and other religious minorities as non-Muslims. What can you do about this???
- Miriam from New York asks: Hillary Clinton, in a recent interview with the Jewish Press, said that pushing for a Palestinian election had been a "big mistake," and that at least we should have taken steps to be sure who won. Does that represent the opinion of the Israel caucus: that democracy should be manipulated in Israel's favor and not reflect the wishes of the people? If not, and the Democratic party respects democratic electoral outcomes, why does it not urge the Bush administration to negotiate with Hamas, which has faithfully refrained from violence for some two years?
- Steve from Philadelphia asks: Given the near total collapse of the Gazan economy in the wake of the election of Hamas and in light of the freeze imposed by Congress earlier this year on USAID funds earmarked for the West Bank and Gaza Strip, does the House Democratic leadership support the resumption of funding for USAID programs that provide critical funding for humanitarian relief and democracy building? And if so, what mechanisms do you support to ensure that critical funds can be delivered to intended targets without the danger of funds being diverted to terrorist organizations?
- Rob from Washington, DC asks: If Iran is Israel's most serious threat, wouldn't resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict be a way to garner support from other moderate Arab nations in preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons?
- Dore from East Northport, NY asks: Democrat and former president Jimmy Carter calls Israel's policy in the Gaza and Judea and Samaria "a system of apartheid, with two peoples occupying the same land but completely separated from each other, with Israelis totally dominant and suppressing violence by depriving Palestinians of their basic human rights." in his new book-as the "Israel Working Group" trying to portray yourselves as friends of Israel are you willing to state unequivocally that this statement is wrong and Jimmy Carter is completely off base in portraying Israel in this way-if so please do so and if not please explain why you will not.
- Carl from West Hartford, CT said: JTA, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, had a four part series under the heading Tainted Teachings. Multiple experts quoted in the series felt that curriculum in Palestinian refugee schools intended to influence how children come to think about current social and political issues by bending historical content to the ideology of the curricula developers. Once developed, the curricula are disseminated by several means, including teacher training programs held under the auspices of some of our most prestigious universities, at U.S. government expense. I hope you will use your influence to have this matter reviewed by the proper Congressional or Administration authorities.
- Gladys from New York asks: I know that this town hall is supposed to be about Israel and the Middle East. I am definitely worried about Israel's future, but as an American Jew, I'm concerned about the erosion of the separation of church and state in this country. It's in the constitution!!
- Linda from Chicago, IL says: When do you think it is OK for the US to go to war? Does the US need UN approval?
- Andrew from Teaneck writes: Is the scheduling of this Town Hall at all related to the impending release of Jimmy Carter's book on Israel?

Welcome from Leader Nancy Pelosi

Hello, this is House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi. Thank you for joining our online townhall and thank you to Congressman Henry Waxman, Congressman Alcee Hastings, Congressman Gene Green, Congressman Steve Israel and Congresswoman Linda Sánchez for being with me. I know we have a lot of questions, so let's begin.

Hi this is Congressman Steve Israel.

Hi this is Congressman Steve Israel. My district is on Long Island, New York, about one hour drive to New York City. I wanted to thank all of you for submitting plenty of questions in advance and for being here today. Feel free to submit questions now as well. I hope we're



Congressman Israel is at his computer in his Hauppauge, Long Island offices

able to get to all of them! I will now hand it over to Congressman Alcee Hastings.

Hi this is Congressman Alcee L. Hastings.

Hi this is Congressman Alcee L. Hastings. I am proud to serve the 23rd District of Florida. As a proud Co-chair of the Democratic Israel Working Group, I have remained one of the strongest advocates on behalf of the State of Israel. I have always strongly supported Israel's right to defend herself against terrorist attacks and will continue to do so for my entire life.

Thank you all for participating in this online townhall forum on the Middle East. I am happy to be able to address any and all of your questions and concerns.

I'm Congressman Henry Waxman.

I'm Congressman Henry Waxman. I represent California's 30th Congressional District, which includes the Westside of Los Angeles and portions of the San Fernando Valley. As a co-chair of the Democratic Israel Working Group, I'm very pleased to participate in this event.

This is Congresswoman Linda Sánchez

This is Congresswoman Linda Sánchez, and I want to thank you all for participating in this on-line forum. This is a great opportunity to advance the discussion on the need for security and peace in the Middle East. I got to see the importance of working towards a lasting and secure peace during a trip to Israel, and I appreciate your commitment to this cause.

Hello, this is Congressman Gene Green from Houston, TX.

Hello, this is Congressman Gene Green from Houston, TX. I represent the 29th District that includes parts of Houston, Pasadena, Baytown, Humble, and unincorporated Harris County. Along with Mr. Waxman, Mr. Hastings, and Ms. Sanchez, I serve as a co-chair of the Democratic Israel Working Group, and would like to thank Mr. Israel and Mrs. Pelosi for arranging this townhall and allowing me to participate.

David from Teaneck, NJ asks: How would Congress' support for Israel change if the Democrats take back the House?

Leader Nancy Pelosi responds:

A strong relationship between the United States and Israel has long been supported by both Democrats and Republicans. America's commitment to the safety and security of the state of Israel is unwavering, regardless of which party is in power.

However, the war in Iraq has made both America and Israel less safe. The situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate and that there is no effective plan for improvement. The escalating sectarian violence coupled with the recent increase in the number of dead and wounded Americans are but the latest

indications that neither the current U.S. plan, nor that of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, will bring stability and security to Iraq or the region. Democrats are united in implementing a plan, whereas Republicans want to continue "staying the course." The Democratic plan for Real Security will mean a more secure region and will protect Americans and restore our country's position of international leadership. I encourage you to learn more about our plan at <http://www.democrats.gov/BK.html>.

Additionally, despite record high fuel prices, our country remains heavily dependent on foreign oil because of an energy policy that benefits Big Oil. Both Israel and America have a stake in energy independence; we cannot afford to be reliant for oil on unstable regions of the world.

Samuel from Phoenix asks: I originally supported the Iraq War because of the President's assurances of an imminent threat and the presence of weapons of mass destruction. Also, viewing current events as a Jewish American, it seemed that regime change in Iraq would help secure Israel. Now, I'm not so sure about that. And, I'm hearing similar rhetoric about Iran right now, and I'm reluctant to be sucked in like last time. What are your views about the Iraq war's effect on Israel and the rhetoric on Iran?

Congressman Waxman responds:

I voted for the resolution authorizing force in large part because of the Bush Administration's insistence that Iraq had or would soon have nuclear weapons. We now know that the Administration distorted much of the pre-war intelligence. Accordingly, I have sponsored legislation that would establish an Independent Commission on Intelligence about Iraq - modeled after the September 11 Commission - to examine pre-war intelligence and the representations made by executive branch officials about Iraqi efforts to develop and deploy weapons of mass destruction. And we must ensure this never happens again.

It's clear now that our failures in Iraq have only further destabilized the Middle East. Israel has become less secure as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hezbollah and Hamas have gained popular support for their extremist agendas. At the same time, the Administration's conduct has damaged our standing in the world and our ability to be effective in diplomatic efforts. At the same time the U.S. is less able to confront Iran credibly because we are tied down in Iraq, where the Iranians can cause us more problems. We are also less able militarily to respond to them.

Gordon from West Bloomfield, MI asks: I am a lifelong Democrat, but I'm uncomfortable with some of the party's fringes, mainly those who blindly take the Palestinian side in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or condemn the Israeli war with Hezbollah terrorists. Any advice?

Congressman Hastings answers:

In the words of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, support for Israel "transcends party lines." For more than 60 years, Democrats and Republicans have realized the importance of a longstanding relationship with Israel. Unfortunately, Republicans have recently attempted to put a partisan spin on an issue that has always been able to rise above party lines. For Israel's sake, this issue must continue to receive unwavering support from majorities on both sides of the aisle.

As is the case with any substantial conflict, not all grassroots Democrats will take the majority's side of an argument. The reason the party's fringe members remain on the fringe, is because they do not represent the majority view in any way regarding the Israel - Palestinian issue, or the Middle East conflict in general.

The vast majority of Democrats have long remained staunch pro- Israel supporters and the minority Democratic opinion makers that disagree on this issue, have differing fringe opinions on a range of issues with the Democratic Party, not just the situation in the Middle East.

Harvey from Oyster Bay, NY asks: Given the 'apparent' unwavering support Pres Bush has given to Israel, is there any chance of his support changing should the Congress turn Democratic in

both houses? Would the State Department act even more pro-Palestinian in that event?

Congressman Israel responds:

You're right that the President has been inconsistent in his relationship with Israel. In 2001, he decided to leave the Middle East alone, not wanting to get down in the dirt. The situation then deteriorated, with suicide bombs going off all over Israel, killing hundreds of Israelis. Not until after over a year of suicide bombings went by did President Bush decide that it would be a good time for a plan. Since then, Hezbollah has become a real, dangerous threat to Israel, right on its border and Iran has begun developing a nuclear program. Israel's threats seem to have gotten stronger. All the while, America's reputation in the world has plummeted.

Nathan from Washington, DC asks: How would a Democratic led House act on the issue of negotiations between Israel and Syria? Would it support the Bush approach of preventing Israel from negotiating until Syria changes its attitude on issues concerning the US or would it encourage Israel to explore chances of peace with Syria?

Congresswoman Sánchez responds:

Unlike his predecessors, President Bush has been essentially disengaged from the peace process, and I see House Democrats as substantially more interested in this issue.

I understand that in Israel today there is some debate about whether or not to enter negotiations with Damascus. In the aftermath of the military operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon, members of the Israeli Cabinet have come out publicly in support of talks with Syria. However, Prime Minister Olmert has publicly taken the stance that Israel will not negotiate with Syria until the U.S. State Department removes it from the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

The government of Syria continues to work with Tehran and Hezbollah, and I believe that the Bush Administration needs to be more vigilant about enforcing the Syria Accountability Act. I would never support removing Syria from the list of state sponsors of terrorism until its policies change dramatically, but that does not mean Israel cannot enter peaceful negotiations with any of its neighbors in the meantime. If Israel believes such a process would lead Syria to abandon support for terrorism and instead embraces peace, then I would welcome such a move.

Adam from Chicago asks: With North Korea's belligerent attitude and its potential ties to terrorist organizations, what effect could a nuclear North Korea have on the Middle East?



Congressman Green answers:

We must take a hard-lined stance with North Korea. North Korea's nuclear test poses a threat to international peace and security. Left unchecked, it could provide a harmful precedent for dealing with Iran's nuclear program. North Korea is the first state to violate its commitments to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; Iran is the second. Both countries have pursued similar political tactics and have a long history of military cooperation. The U.N. Security Council must now apply firm sanctions on both Iran and North Korea to force

these rogue regimes to reconsider their nuclear programs.

Barry from Encino, CA writes: What are your views on the current debate in Europe about how Muslims fit into society and what are the implications in America?

Congressman Waxman responds:

It's hard to compare Muslims in Europe to Muslims in America because our respective histories are so

different, and because the U.S. has a unique national history of religious freedom and tolerance. In many ways, Muslims in the United States have a lot in common with other minority groups, including Jews. There is great diversity among Muslims of ethnicity, personal and family history, educational attainment, socioeconomic status, religious and political beliefs.

Our American system will lead to assimilation and Americanization of Muslims, particularly the next generation. In Europe, Muslims have been more isolated and do not have the same opportunities to become part of the rest of the society.

Congresswoman Sánchez adds:

What a great question. The interesting thing to me about what's happening in Europe is that the continent itself is going through a serious analysis of its own identity. We're talking about societies that have been around, established – at least ethnically and religiously – and autonomous to some degree for centuries.

Now, modern European countries are dealing with their integration into the European Union, as well as the recent influx of African, Middle Eastern, and Asian immigrants.

I don't want to use the term "identity crisis," but Europe is definitely feeling its way out on this one. I think the discussion has been centered on Muslims because of the despicable acts of a few individuals – for instance those responsible for the London train bombings and the murder of Dutch film director Theo Van Gogh – who I do not believe are representative of the larger European Muslim community.

The United States, on the other hand, is a far younger country that has defined itself as a land of immigrants. We call ourselves the "Land of Opportunity" for just that reason. That's why I think the debate in Europe is very different from here in the U.S. I believe that the U.S. needs to continue to be a nation that welcomes immigrants and diversity.

Debbie from Newton, MA asks: I went on vacation to France a couple of years ago, and it seems that the Jewish community is getting smaller and smaller, moving to Israel and Canada. What can we do about European anti-Semitism?



Congressman Alcee Hastings

Congressman Hastings responds:

The new wave of anti-Semitism is evident in Europe from verbal attacks on Jews to vandalism of Jewish property. The increase in the open hatred of Jews is deeply troubling to me and one I am truly concerned about.

As former President of the Organization for Cooperation and Security (OSCE), the world's largest regional security organization, I am intimately knowledgeable about issues concerning the prevalence and increase of anti-Semitism in Europe. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has brought the fight against anti-Semitism to the forefront of the international agenda. The OSCE has helped sponsor several conferences on anti-Semitism, with the support and assistance of the ADL and the international Jewish community.

I believe as a global community, we must work harder to further delegitimize the actions and teaching of those who preach intolerance in Europe and around the world. Anti-Semitism is a hallmark of racial or religious hatred that needs to be monitored and addressed. My fellow Democrats are intent on creating a larger world of understanding and coexistence.

Talia from Las Vegas, NV asks: What is the Democratic platform on energy independence? I think that one of the biggest national security dangers to Israel and America is the reliance on foreign oil.

Congressman Green answers:

Dependence on foreign sources of oil is a major concern, and while Congress has taken steps to address this, more must be done. We are not going to end our dependence overnight, but we must do more to promote fuel efficient vehicles, hybrids, and renewable fuels.

My colleagues here today and I are cosponsors of legislation that will promote research in conjunction with Israel to reduce dependence on petroleum products. The United States-Israel Energy Cooperation Act builds on the United States-Israel Binational Science Foundations and the United States-Israel Binational Industrial Research and Development Foundation, which have already made many scientific breakthroughs in life sciences, medicine, bioengineering, agriculture, biotechnology and communications. This legislation will promote research on energy improvements as well.

Congressman Israel adds:

The fact is that every military challenge we face is either derived from or impacted by one thing: our reliance on fossil fuels and foreign energy sources. As Iran attempts to develop nuclear weapons, all of our potential responses – diplomacy, economic tools, military force – are impacted by the fact that Iran is the fourth largest exporter of crude oil in the world and will use that leverage in every way possible. 90% of Persian Gulf oil and 25% of global oil supplies move through Straits of Hormuz. China is now the world's fastest growing economy. According to the Congressional Budget Office, 30 percent of the growth in worldwide oil demand in 2004 came from China alone. By the year 2030, if the current pattern continues, China is likely to have more vehicles than the United States. Beijing's voracious appetite for energy creates a strong competition with the United States for new sources of oil.

Last year, the Pentagon spent \$10.6 billion on basic energy costs. Of that, the Air Force spent \$4.7 billion, nearly half, on one thing: oil for its planes. With an \$8 trillion debt, we must borrow money from China to fund our military to buy oil from unstable Persian Gulf countries to fly Air Force planes to protect us from China and unstable Persian Gulf countries. That is not simply an absurdity; it is a vulnerability.

Whenever our nation has faced critical threats, we mobilized, manufactured, engineered, researched, developed and invested in the human and technical resources necessary to meet and master those challenges.

In 1960 – three years after the Soviets launched Sputnik – President Kennedy said, "By the end of the decade we will land on the moon." And we did. We need a "man-on-the-moon" energy program.

Our reliance on fossil fuels and foreign sources of energy are as grave and great as all of the dangers and challenges we mastered before. It is time to do what America has always done: make the choices and investments necessary to protect our children.

I refuse – and you should refuse – to be the first generation of Americans in our history to say "it's too hard" when it comes to the safety and security of our children.

The development of industry and schools after World War II that landed a man on the moon was accomplished by a group of people we now call "The Greatest Generation."

Today, faced with similar threats and critical opportunities, it falls on us to accept that legacy. My plan, called the Next Generation Energy Security can be found on my website.

Lori from Maplewood, NJ asks: I'm concerned that Democrats care too much about America's appearance throughout the world and will do anything to be better liked, including compromising

America's interests.**Congressman Green answers:**

Democrats are committed to America's security and American interests, and would work to undo the damage done by the Administration's unilateral approach to foreign policy. However, working with our allies is not synonymous with sacrificing America's interests.

Repairing trans-Atlantic relations should be the top priority. Our European allies are a strategic partner in combating terrorism, halting the spread of nuclear weapons, and improving working conditions and human rights around the globe, and we should work with them to address this problem.

Carrie from Atlanta, GA asks: Do you believe that the president will take military action against Iran before he leaves office? Do you believe that Israel has those capabilities and the will to do it?

Rep. Hastings replies:

It is entirely unpredictable what the ultimate decision of the Bush administration towards Iranian nuclear non-proliferation defiance will be. However, it seems to me that our troops are spread too thin in Iraq and Afghanistan, and our international credibility is too weak, to attempt any military action in Iran.

With regard to Israel's capabilities, while Israel may have the military capabilities, it will have to deeply consider the cost-benefit ratio of engaging in military action with such an unstable regime in inhospitable territory.

Rep. Waxman adds: I believe it's premature to talk about military action against Iran. We are only beginning to take advantage of the diplomatic tools at our disposal.

I do not believe Israel has the capability to sustain the kind of military strike necessary to deal with Iran. If Israel acted, it would be assumed by the world that they were acting on behalf of the United States. Thus, it is ultimately our responsibility, with the international community, to deal with this problem.

Hannah from Hancock Park, CA asks: What is your stance on pressuring Israel to make a deal with the Palestinians, especially Hamas, who are proud of killing Israelis?



Leader Nancy Pelosi, Congressman Jim McGovern, Congresswoman Anna Eshoo and Congressman Edward Markey greet former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

Leader Nancy Pelosi responds:

The Congress of the United States will not support the Palestinian Authority if its governing political party calls for the destruction of Israel. As such, Hamas has a critical decision to make. Despite indications to the contrary, I hope it will choose to disavow the tactics of a terrorist organization, recognize Israel's right to exist, embrace the political process, and move the Palestinian people forward.

There have been several votes during the 109th Congress that reaffirm Congress' concern about Hamas' ascendance in the Palestinian leadership. In December of 2005, before the Palestinian elections, I voted for H. Res. 575, a resolution asserting that Hamas and other terrorist organizations should not participate in elections held by the Palestinian Authority.

In May of 2006, I voted for H.R. 4681, the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act. This legislation would have required that aid to a Palestinian government led by Hamas or another terrorist group is dependent on recognizing Israel, renouncing terror, and accepting previous Israeli-Palestinian peace agreements. However, the Republican controlled Senate passed a different version of the bill, one which lacks the teeth to make this legislation effective.

Eric from Dallas, TX asks: What are the reasons America's youth should support a strong Israel while demoralizing attitudes and statements from leaders such as President Carter are extensive and a situation on the ground exists where peace does not seem imminent?

Congressman Israel responds:

Support for Israel is vital among young people, because it is challenged on so many fronts. Although I disagree with President Carter's views I am much more concerned with Iran's gathering strength over the past six years, with Hezbollah's increased strength and with the proliferation of threats around Israel. One book by one person does not pose a danger to Israel, even though I disagree with what the book said. We should all work closely together on a bipartisan basis to ensure that Israel and the United States can meet and defeat the strategic threats confronting Israel.

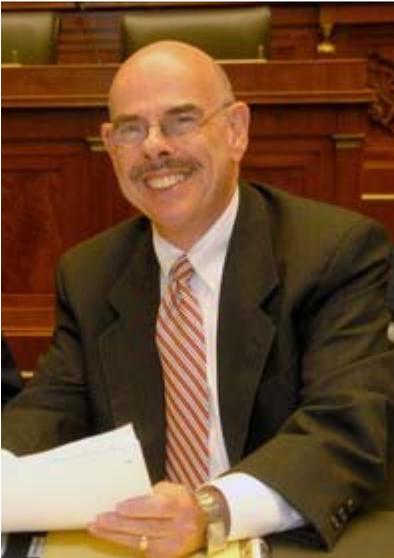
Rita from South Florida writes: Approximately 850,000 Jews were displaced from Arab countries after the State of Israel was created in 1948 and never received refugee status. Many Jews were persecuted and suffered humiliation, human rights violations and expulsion from the countries of their birthplace. What can we do to address this? Jews are refugees too!

Congresswoman Sánchez replies:

This is an issue which has wrongly been absent from international discussions. Sadly, not enough people in the international community are even aware of the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Jewish people throughout the Middle East.

We must do more to formally and publicly recognize this historic tragedy. Such an effort would need to be focused internationally. There are several campaigns of other historic wrongs that could serve as a model, and our country's diplomatic infrastructure could play a role in advancing this needed recognition.

Gary from Riverdale, NY asks: I think that this is great that you are all doing this, but many members of my community, myself included, are afraid of committee chairmanships getting into the wrong hands, i.e. anti-israel hands, should the Democrats take back the house. Is there truth to the rumors?



Congressman Waxman from California answers your questions.

Congressman Waxman responds:

No matter which party controls the Congress, the House and Senate will continue to be overwhelmingly supportive of Israel, on both sides of the aisle. Support for Israel stems from shared democratic values and the fact that Israel's interests are closely aligned with our own in fighting terrorism and extremism and in promoting democracy.

I resent when Republicans try to portray some Democrats as not supportive of Israel. Overwhelmingly Democrats and Republicans are supportive and we don't want to have Israel become a partisan issue.

There will be some Democratic chairmen who may not share all my views or have as clear a perspective on Israel as I do, but they will not be chairing committees dealing with Israel and the Middle East.

Yitzchak from Rockville, MD asks: Ms. Pelosi, In 2005 you declared that "For too long, leaders of both political parties in the United States have not done nearly enough to confront the Russians and the Chinese, who have supplied Iran as it has plowed ahead with its nuclear and missile technology". What are you intend to do as The Speaker to resolve the problem?

Leader Nancy Pelosi responds:

If evidence of participation by other nations in Iran's nuclear program is discovered, I will insist that the Administration use, rather than ignore, the evidence in determining how the U.S. deals with that nation or nations on other issues.

Susie from Bloomington, IN writes: If the Democrats capture the House, how will our approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict differ from the Administration's present "do not get involved" course? Do you see the Democrats taking a more pro-active approach?

Congressman Hastings responds:

The Republican's foreign policy approach from Iraq to the Middle East has been one large failure. The administration's policy has failed to stem the violence in Iraq and the Middle East, and in some respects, it has even further fueled the conflict.

The Bush administration's stance towards foreign policy in Iraq has helped incite Hamas and other terrorist organizations in the Palestinian territories to take hostile action against Israel. The same policies may also have limited the United States' options in working to realize peace in the Middle East region.

Democrats will continue to remain active to encourage the Israelis and the Palestinians to reach a peaceful two state solution.

Michael from Long Island asks: What are your views on the Feinstein-Leahy amendment to FY07 Defense Authorization to prohibit the Pentagon from using or selling cluster bombs unless they can ensure that they will not be used in or near any concentrated population of civilians.

Congressman Israel responds:

International law already prohibits the deliberate use of armaments against civilian populations. One of the significant concerns with so called cluster bombs is that the individual bomblets do not detonate when intended and therefore could pose a threat to civilians significantly after a military operation is over. I would support continued research and development to ensure that so called cluster bombs which fail to detonate in a military setting do not pose a threat to civilian populations.

Roger from Lakewood, NJ asks: How can you disengage from Iraq and still maintain a stable middle east? If Iraq is left to its own the strongest backed element wins, and the whole mid-east is radicalized, what then?We can not afford that outcome- what are the dems plans????

Rep. Alcee Hastings replies:

The constant volatile situation and existence of state sponsor's of terror and terrorist organizations in the region make it extremely difficult to predict the correct path to achieving peace.

However, the issue of attaining stability in the Middle East transcends party lines. While Republicans claim to be more pro- Israel, a definitive argument can be made that Republicans foreign policy strategy in Iraq has encouraged terrorist acts against Israel. and has made other nations less likely to cooperate with U.S. policies in the region.

For certain, the Democrat's policy, like Republican policy, will remain intent on working with all credible peace partners to achieve a lasting peace.

Congresswoman Sánchez adds:

Democrats realize that the inflexibility of the Bush Administration's policy in the Middle East is its greatest problem.

Democrats believe that our experts in the military, the Foreign Service, the State Department, diplomatic corps, intelligence and other agencies should have a seat at the table to develop a plan for action in the Middle East.

Karen from Leawood, KS asks: Do you support or oppose the US/Israel ratifying the ICC treaty?



Congressman Gene Green and Israeli Ambassador Ayalon

Congressman Green responds:

I am skeptical of the ICC, and I support the U.S. position of not ratifying the treaty. I support the participation of U. S. forces in peacekeeping missions and believe that we do have a responsibility to help nations less fortunate than us. However, I have concerns about how the ICC will function, and about the vulnerability of U. S. troops to politically motivated prosecutions by the ICC, even if our actions are approved by the U. N.

For example, since it is generally agreed that world leaders have immunity from prosecution except in certain heinous examples, would China be allowed to file charges against the pilot who accidentally bombed the Chinese embassy in Kosovo, even though that mission was conducted under U. N. auspices? Further, what punishment would be allowed, and where would it be carried out?

Israel holds the same position, and I fully support their decision not to ratify the treaty. The U.S. has enemies abroad, but Israel has enemies on their borders that will do anything to cause problem for Israel, and the ICC would likely prove to be another thorn in Israel's side.

Yaacov from Brooklyn, NY asks: After Republicans got caught accepting vacations from lobbyists, it seemed that Representatives stopped taking trips. But, trips to Israel are different. Do you believe that educational Congressional trips that are privately funded should be banned?

Congressman Israel responds:

I believe there is a major difference between the types of trips that many Republicans took with Jack Abramoff which were designed to secure support for private entities and the educational trips that Member of Congress take to Israel to understand the strategic issue of the Middle East. That's why I support reforming Congressional travel but ensuring that Member of Congress are appropriately educated about the importance of allies such as Israel in US foreign policy.

Jack from Shaker Heights, OH asks: What are your views on the House resolution in July of 2006, in the midst of Israel's war with Hezbollah?

Leader Nancy Pelosi responds:

I think you are referring to H. Res. 921, a resolution condemning the attacks against the state of Israel, holding terrorists and their state-sponsors accountable for such attacks, and supporting Israel's right to defend itself. I voted for that resolution and urged my colleagues to do so as well. You can read my speech on the House floor at <http://democraticleader.house.gov/press/articles.cfm?pressReleaseID=1704>.

Alon from Silver Spring, MD asks: I am very concerned about the deteriorating level of support for Israel among rank and file Democrats. All polls show that support for Israel is much stronger among Republicans than Democrats and that Democratic voters show much less understanding for Israel's defensive military actions. Democratic voters also seem much less determined to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and seem too force averse on that issue. In addition, there is a wide spread perception that the pro-Israel lobby was behind the war in Iraq. How does the Democratic leadership plan to educate its rank and file members regarding the need to support

Israel in its war on terrorism?**Rep. Israel responds:**

Alon, support for Israel should be a bipartisan endeavor, and there is no diminution of that support among Democrats in Congress. In fact, every recent legislative initiative supporting Israel received enthusiastic and widespread support among Democrats. Although we may disagree with Republicans on issues like slashing funds for college tuition assistance, investing in education, and promoting religious tolerance and respect, there are no partisan divisions on critical issues such as military and economic support for Israel. Indeed, Democratic leaders have consistently sought smart and tough foreign and military policies that would strengthen Israel against the recent emerging threats coming from places like Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and elsewhere. One of the smartest things we can do to support Israel is pass a coherent energy policy so that we don't have to continue to rely on Israel's Persian Gulf adversaries to fuel our military with Persian Gulf oil. As a Democrat, I'm proud to have helped to lead that effort.

David from Boston asks: The spread of nuclear weapons is terrifying in this day in age, but are non-proliferation treaties the answer?

Congresswoman Sanchez of California's 39th

Congresswoman Sanchez responds:

Non-proliferation agreements are a vital tool in preserving global security and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons technology. We must face the reality, however, that today's world is more dangerous. A frightening amount of fissile material remains inadequately protected throughout the former Soviet states. Global uranium reserves are inadequately monitored, and nuclear technologies have already passed into dangerous hands. Our programs to eliminate loose nuclear materials remain under funded and our diplomatic efforts to economically punish offenders have been sluggish at best.

Liron from Madison, WI asks: While I believe in the United States cooperating with other nations on international issues, I'm concerned about the UN's bias against Israel. Do you agree or disagree?**Congressman Waxman responds:**

The U.N. General Assembly is completely controlled by anti-Israel and anti-Semitic forces. I think the U.N. needs to be fundamentally reformed to weaken the corruption and knee-jerk anti-Israel actions. The U.N. Security Council, on the other hand, will act only with U.S. support and there are many times when U.S. interests are served by having a U.N.

William from Chicago, IL asks: In May, there was a new law passed by the Iranian parliament that would require the country's Jews and Christians to wear colored badges to identify them and other religious minorities as non-Muslims. What can you do about this???**Congressman Hastings responds:**



Congressman Hastings travels to Israel with President Clinton on Air Force One

If true, this report would obviously be of great concern. Though doubt has been cast on this report, it deserves to be closely followed. Clearly Jews living in Iran face great challenges and widespread discrimination as second-class citizens. The rogue Authoritarian regime in Iran poses a huge threat to not only Iranian minority groups, but to the entire international community. For years, Iranian President Ahmadinejad has been publicly spewing alarming anti- Israel and anti-United States statements as well as publicly denying the Holocaust.

Iran's actions and statements will prove more dangerous to its people and to the security of the global community if Iran acquires nuclear capabilities. We can simply not allow a repressive anti-Semitic regime with ideological goals, and an active sponsor of global terrorism, to possess nuclear powers. In light of Iran's defiance of international non-nuclear proliferation law, I have introduced legislation this session this fall calling for the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1696, requiring the implementation of multilateral sanctions and for President Bush to implement and exhaust every sanction at its disposal against Iran.

Miriam from New York asks: Hillary Clinton, in a recent interview with the Jewish Press, said that pushing for a Palestinian election had been a "big mistake," and that at least we should have taken steps to be sure who won. Does that represent the opinion of the Israel caucus: that democracy should be manipulated in Israel's favor and not reflect the wishes of the people? If not, and the Democratic party respects democratic electoral outcomes, why does it not urge the Bush administration to negotiate with Hamas, which has faithfully refrained from violence for some two years?



Congressman Israel greets Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at the 2006 Joint Session between the House and the Senate.

Congressman Israel responds:

Miriam – I understand your question. When I visited Abu Mazen in his office in Gaza two years ago, he told me the wishes of the Palestinian people were to be able to live in peace and do what my constituents do: go to the beach and visit their families, and live in decent housing with good paying jobs. I believe he is correct. The problem is that neither he nor the leaders of Hamas have demonstrated an ability to grant their populations these desires, because either they cannot create the conditions of security that are necessary to negotiate peace with Israel or they will not create those conditions. No nation can be expected to negotiate peace unless its adversaries have the capability to enforce the terms of that peace. When the Palestinian leadership demonstrates the ability to live up to its promises for peace, then it will be able to respond to the wishes of its own population.

Steve from Philadelphia asks: Given the near total collapse of the Gazan economy in the wake of the election of Hamas and in light of the freeze imposed by Congress earlier this year on USAID funds earmarked for the West Bank and Gaza Strip, does the House Democratic leadership support the resumption of funding for USAID programs that provide critical funding for humanitarian relief and democracy building? And if so, what mechanisms do you support to ensure that critical funds can be delivered to intended targets without the danger of funds being diverted to terrorist organizations?

Congresswoman Sánchez responds:

The election of Hamas was unfortunate on so many levels, including the one that you bring up, which is the need of the United States to freeze financial support for a group that refuses to recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist and denounce all forms of terrorism.

I agree with you that international aid has been important to Palestinian development. And I agree with you that we need to encourage the democratic development in the Palestinian territories and, indeed,

throughout the world. And an important lesson in this process is that a vote, like any other choice, has consequences.

Ultimately, we support the right of people to elect the government of their choice. We do not, however, have to support the government that they choose – just as they do not always support ours.

One thing that should be made clear is that we are still providing some humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. The United States provides approximately \$80 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Portions of this funding are still being used to provide food, shelter, medical care, and education in the Palestinian territories. To date, I have seen no reports indicating that any of this money is being misused in the Palestinian territories.

Also, there is often a misperception that U.S. financial assistance was provided directly to the Palestinian Authority. With a handful of exceptions, this is untrue. U.S. assistance is primarily administered by USAID, which uses contractors –often non-governmental organizations – that implement development programs. After the election of Hamas, USAID funding for the Palestinians was put on hold. Before the restoration of any of this funding can even be considered, we need to see from USAID a detailed and transparent system for verifying that funding goes to the intended recipients.

Rob from Washington, DC asks: If Iran is Israel's most serious threat, wouldn't resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict be a way to garner support from other moderate Arab nations in preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons?

Congresswoman Sánchez answers:

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the defining global issues of our time. Resolving this conflict would be a great achievement, the effects of which would obviously transform the Middle East.

While this peace process is critically important, the driving forces behind the Iranian ambitions are complex. We can't assume that building favor among moderate Arab nations through even more modest steps along the peace process will stop Iran from developing a nuclear arsenal and delivering on its repeated threats against Israel.

While continuing to pursue peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, we must also continue to focus on other avenues at the same time. Currently, U.S. diplomats are trying to move forward a U.N. Security Council resolution to ban the sale of missile and atomic technology to Iran. It is very important that we do not ignore the important role that other nations like Russia and China also play in deterring Tehran from pursuing nuclear weapons.

Congressman Waxman adds:

If Iran is armed with nuclear weapons, it will be a threat to all of its Arab neighbors, not just Israel (and the United States). Arab nations should have a strong interest to isolate extremists like Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and work with the US and Europe to keep Iran from developing or acquiring nuclear weapons.

In the past, American peace efforts have increased our standing in the Arab world and we must remain committed to the fundamental goal of two states living side by side in peace and security. But we cannot help resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict when the fundamental problem is the unwillingness of the Palestinian and other Arab leaders to even accept a Jewish state of Israel.

But even if the Arab-Israeli conflict could be resolved, extremists in the Muslim world, particularly Iranians, would still try to acquire nuclear weapons and engage in terrorism, unless they are stopped by the international community.

Dore from East Northport, NY asks: Democrat and former president Jimmy Carter calls Israel's

policy in the Gaza and Judea and Samaria "a system of apartheid, with two peoples occupying the same land but completely separated from each other, with Israelis totally dominant and suppressing violence by depriving Palestinians of their basic human rights." in his new book-as the "Israel Working Group" trying to portray yourselves as friends of Israel are you willing to state unequivocally that this statement is wrong and Jimmy Carter is completely off base in portraying Israel in this way-if so please do so and if not please explain why you will not.

Leader Nancy Pelosi responds:

With all due respect to former President Carter, he does not speak for the Democratic Party on Israel. Democrats have been steadfast in their support of Israel from its birth, in part because we recognize that to do so is in the national security interests of the United States. We stand with Israel now and we stand with Israel forever. The Jewish people know what it means to be oppressed, discriminated against, and even condemned to death because of their religion. They have been leaders in the fight for human rights in the United States and throughout the world. It is wrong to suggest that the Jewish people would support a government in Israel or anywhere else that institutionalizes ethnically based oppression, and Democrats reject that allegation vigorously

Carl from West Hartford, CT said: JTA, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, had a four part series under the heading Tainted Teachings. Multiple experts quoted in the series felt that curriculum in Palestinian refugee schools intended to influence how children come to think about current social and political issues by bending historical content to the ideology of the curricula developers. Once developed, the curricula are disseminated by several means, including teacher training programs held under the auspices of some of our most prestigious universities, at U.S. government expense. I hope you will use your influence to have this matter reviewed by the proper Congressional or Administration authorities.

Congressman Hastings answers:

Education is a fundamental part of preparing our youth for the future. However, biased or inaccurate viewpoints can skew the information being provided to students. I believe it is important to ensure that while teachers are able to discuss controversial topics in educational institutions, they most also strike a balance between providing alternative viewpoints and teaching misinformation.

I am a strong advocate of responding meaningfully to the wrongful spread of misinformation to students. For instance, in this session in Congress, in response to reports that some Saudi Arabian textbooks included misinformation that advocated extremist, anti-Semitic and anti-Western views, I cosponsored legislation advocating the reform of the country's educational system. This legislation encouraged the President and the Secretary of State to use diplomacy to help reform the Saudi Arabian educational system.

Information should be factually taught without bias. If biased information is being disseminated, it is important to properly review the extent of the bias – and whether taxpayer funds are involved – and what avenues can be taken to ensure that teachers are providing their students with the most accurate knowledge possible.

Gladys from New York asks: I know that this town hall is supposed to be about Israel and the Middle East. I am definitely worried about Israel's future, but as an American Jew, I'm concerned about the erosion of the separation of church and state in this country. It's in the constitution!!

Congressman Gene Green responds:

I share your concern about the separation of church and state, and I strongly believe much of what we are seeing is politically motivated. Personal beliefs play a different role for each of us and guide us in our decisions, but we should not direct those beliefs on other people.

Linda from Chicago, IL says: When do you think it is OK for the US to go to war? Does the US need UN approval?

Congressman Waxman responds:

The U.S. is justified in using military power any time we determine it to be in our interests. We should work with the international community but not be dependent upon them if our interests are at stake.

Andrew from Teaneck writes: Is the scheduling of this Town Hall at all related to the impending release of Jimmy Carter's book on Israel?

Rep. Israel replies:

No, in fact we conduct E-Town Hall meetings routinely throughout the course of the year. I hope you will join my next one on the topic of energy security.

I think that's the last one. Thanks so much for joining us!

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