

# Michael Stein Address on U.S. Middle East Policy

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## In-Depth Reports

**G**en. James L. Jones (Ret., USMC), President Obama's national security advisor, delivered the Michael Stein Address on U.S. Middle East Policy at The Washington Institute's Soref Symposium on April 21, 2010. The event honored the Institute's 25th anniversary.

Gen. Jones previously served as special envoy for Middle East regional security, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) and commander of the United States European Command (USEUCOM). In more than four decades with the Marine Corps, he served in a variety of command and staff positions while stationed in the United States, Europe, and Asia. General Jones retired from active duty in 2007.

The following are his prepared remarks as released by the White House.

Thank you all very much. Thank you, Martin Gross, for your very kind introduction, and for your leadership as the Institute's new president. You have 25 years of Institute history to live up to ... and 25 years of Institute presidents watching to make sure you get it right.

Thank you Rob Satloff, for welcoming us tonight.

On this, your 25th anniversary, let me commend all those who have made the Washington Institute for Near East Policy the respected institution it is today ... especially past presidents Barbi Weinberg, Fred Lafer, Michael Stein and your Chairman Howard Berkowitz.

I also want to thank your distinguished Trustees and Board of Advisors -- which has one empty chair tonight because of the recent loss of one of your longtime Advisors ... a public servant ... a true warrior-diplomat ... and one of my predecessors as Supreme Allied Commander Europe. Tonight, we remember General and Secretary of State Alexander Haig.

For a quarter-century ... through five different administrations ... this Institute has provided an invaluable service, to policymakers and the American people. Instead of partisanship, you've given us scholarship. Instead of simply recycling old arguments, you've given us fresh and objective analysis. So I want to thank Rob and your entire staff ... and 25 years of scholars and fellows ... for your insights and your contributions.

I've seen it myself. A few years ago, I served as Special Envoy for Middle East Regional Security. Our work was strengthened by the advice and counsel of many experts, including one of our special advisors -- and your Senior Fellows -- Matthew Levitt. We benefited from discussions with other Institute Fellows, including David Makovsky and Dennis Ross. And, of course, President Obama's Administration was all too happy to steal Dennis away from you,

and he is now helping to lead our efforts in the region at the National Security Council. And I believe Dennis is here tonight.

I especially want to thank the Institute for your work on behalf of the effort that President Obama called for in his speech last year in Cairo -- that is, greater understanding between the United States and Muslim communities around world. The President called for "a sustained effort to listen to each other, to learn from each other, to respect one another, and to seek common ground."

In that spirit, you've been promoting mutual understanding for many years ... whether it's welcoming to Washington scholars from Cairo to Baghdad ... your Arabic-language website ... Rob's weekly Arabic-language interview show ... or his recent documentary recounting the little known story of how Arabs saved Jews from the Holocaust.

So thank you all ... for analysis that has strengthened our national security ... and for promoting the mutual understanding that can lead to a safer, more secure world for us all. And I wish you continued success, because, frankly, our nation -- indeed, the world -- needs institutions like yours now more than ever.

Indeed, since taking office, President Obama has made it clear that his first and foremost priority is the safety and security of the American people. To this end, he has pursued a new era of American leadership and comprehensive engagement based on mutual interests and mutual respect.

In the coming weeks, we'll be releasing a new National Security Strategy that formalizes the President's approach -- an approach that is rooted in and guided by our national security interests. These interests are clear and enduring.

- Security -- we have an enduring interest in the security of the United States, our citizens and U.S. allies and partners;
- Prosperity -- we have an enduring interest in a strong, innovative and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity;
- Values -- we have an enduring interest in upholding universal values, at home and around the world; and,
- International Order -- we have an enduring interest in an international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.

Security, prosperity, universal values, and an international order advanced by American leadership -- these are the interests that the President and his Administration are working to advance around the world every day, including in the Middle East.

To strengthen our security, we are responsibly ending the war in Iraq. As evidenced by the successes this weekend of military operations against al Qaeda in Iraq, Iraqi security forces are in the lead. The United States will end our combat mission by the end of August. In accordance with the U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement, all U.S. forces will be out Iraq by the end of next year. Now, the most immediate challenge is for Iraqi political leaders to form an inclusive and representative government. As they face the longer-term challenges of expanding prosperity and opportunity, the Iraqi people will continue to have a partner in the United States.

In Afghanistan and beyond, we have refocused the fight against al Qaeda and its extremist allies. We've struck major blows against their leaders, who are now hunkered down in the tribal regions along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. At the same time, we're forging partnerships that isolate extremists, combat corruption and promote good governance and development -- all of which improves the daily lives of ordinary people and undermines the forces that fuel violent extremism.

And to confront the greatest threat to global security -- the danger that terrorists will obtain nuclear weapons or materials -- the President hosted last week's historic Nuclear Security Summit, where 46 nations joined the goal of securing the world's vulnerable nuclear materials in four years.

To advance our prosperity, the President has worked with allies and partners to expand the global economic recovery ... pursue growth that is balanced and sustained ... launched a national export initiative to double American exports and support two million American jobs ... and reformed the international economic architecture so that the G-20 is now the premier forum for international cooperation.

And as he promised in Cairo, next week the President will host a Summit on Entrepreneurship with business leaders and entrepreneurs from more than 50 nations -- including many Muslim-majority countries and Israel -- to promote our common prosperity.

To advance values that are universal, the President has made it clear that the United States will uphold our ideals both at home and abroad, including the right of people to have a say in how they are governed. As the President said in Cairo, the U.S. is committed to supporting governments that reflect the will of the people, because history shows that these governments are more stable, more successful, and more secure. So political reform and effective and accountable governance will remain core elements of our vision for the future, in the Middle East and around the world.

And to advance a just and sustainable international order, the United States is working to ensure that both the rights and responsibilities of all nations are upheld. For example, the new START Treaty with Russia is part of the President's comprehensive agenda to pursue a world without nuclear weapons -- an agenda that reflects the three pillars of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty: nations with nuclear weapons will reduce them, nations without nuclear weapons will forsake them, and the recognition that nations have a right to peaceful nuclear energy.

Whether or not the rights and responsibilities of nations are upheld will in great measure determine whether the coming years and decades result in greater security, prosperity and opportunity -- for Americans and for people around the world.

Perhaps nowhere do we see this more than in the Middle East, where we face two defining challenges that I want to touch on tonight: preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them, and forging a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians as part of a comprehensive peace in the region.

When President Obama took office, Iran had already assembled thousands of centrifuges and accumulated nearly a bomb's worth of low enriched uranium. Iran was in active violation of five UN Security Council Resolutions. Moreover, Iran's sponsorship of terrorist actors in Iraq, Lebanon, and Gaza signaled a continued determination to sow its brand of violence and coercion across the Middle East.

Clearly, a policy of not engaging Iran did not work. That is why President Obama made clear his commitment to engage Iran on the basis of mutual respect on the full range of issues that divide our countries. As the President repeatedly said, he was under no illusions. He knew it would not be easy to overcome decades of mistrust, suspicion, and even open hostility between our countries. But he also knew that engagement was necessary to present Iran with a choice and to unite the international community around the need for Iran meet its international obligations.

So to advance our interests, President Obama extended his hand and the opportunity for dialogue. American and Iranian diplomats met in Geneva in October, and through the International Atomic Energy Agency. With strong support from the United States, France, and Russia, the IAEA put forward a creative offer to produce nuclear fuel using Iran's own low enriched uranium. It was an offer with humanitarian benefits, ensuring that Iran would meet its need for medical isotopes. It gave Iran the opportunity to show that its nuclear program was for peaceful purposes. It would have built confidence on both sides in the possibility of further agreements. In addition, the

United States went to great lengths to demonstrate our commitment and establish assurances for Iran.

To date, we have seen no indication that Iran's leaders want to resolve these issues constructively. After initially accepting it, they rejected the Tehran Research Reactor proposal. They have refused to discuss their nuclear program with the P5+1. The revelation of a previously covert enrichment site, construction of which further violated Iran's NPT obligations, fed further suspicion about Iran's intentions. Iran recently increased the enrichment levels of its uranium to 20 percent. All the while, Iran continues to brutally repress its own citizens and prohibit their universal rights to express themselves freely and choose their own future.

These are not the behaviors of a responsible international actor, and they are not the actions of a government committed to peaceful diplomacy and a new relationship with a willing and ready partner.

Indeed, Iran's continued defiance of its international obligations on its nuclear program and its support of terrorism represents a significant regional and global threat. A nuclear-armed Iran could transform the landscape of the Middle East, precipitating a nuclear arms race, dramatically increasing the prospect and danger of local conflicts, fatally wounding the global non-proliferation regime, and emboldening the terrorists and extremists who threaten the United States and our allies.

Therefore, we are now working actively with allies and partners to increase the costs of Iran's continued failure to live up to its international obligations. This includes a U.N. Security Council sanctions resolution.

As President Obama has stated, our offer of engagement with Iran stands, and we remain prepared to pursue a better and more positive future. Iran has rights, but with those rights come responsibilities. If Iran's leaders do not fulfill those responsibilities, and if they continue to violate their international obligations, they will face ever deepening isolation.

Iran's government must face real consequences for its continued defiance of the international community. We hope that Iran will make the right choice and acts to restore the confidence of the international community in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

However, should Iran's leaders fail to make that choice, President Obama has been very clear, and I want to repeat it here: the United States is determined to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. In so doing, we will avoid a nuclear arms race in the region and the proliferation of nuclear technology to terrorist organizations.

Of course, one of the ways that Iran exerts influence in the Middle East is by exploiting the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. Iran uses the conflict to keep others in the region on the defensive and to try to limit its own isolation. Ending this conflict, achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians and establishing a sovereign Palestinian state would therefore take such an evocative issue away from Iran, Hizballah, and Hamas. It would allow our partners in the region to focus on building their states and institutions. And peace between Israel and Syria, if it is possible, could have a transformative effect on the region.

Since taking office, President Obama has pursued a two-state solution -- a secure, Jewish state of Israel living side by side in peace and security with a viable and independent Palestinian state. This is in the United States' interest. It is in Israel's interest. It is in the Palestinians' interest. It is in the interest of the Arab countries, and, indeed, the world. Advancing this peace would also help prevent Iran from cynically shifting attention away from its failures to meet its obligations.

And since there has been a lot of distortion and misrepresentation of our policy recently, let me take this opportunity to address our relationship with our ally Israel. Like any two nations, we will have of disagreements, but we will always resolve them as allies. And we will never forget that since the first minutes of Israeli independence, the United States has had a special relationship with Israel. And that will not change.

Why? Because this is not a commitment of Democrats or Republicans; it is a national commitment based on shared values, deep and interwoven connections, and mutual interests.

As President Obama declared in Cairo, "America's strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable." They are the bonds of history -- two nations that earned our independence through the sacrifice of patriots. They are the bonds of two people, bound together by shared values of freedom and individual opportunity. They are the bonds of two democracies, where power resides in the people. They are the bonds of pioneers in science, technology and so many fields where we cooperate every day. They are the bonds of friendship, including the ties of so many families and friends.

This week marked the 62nd anniversary of Israeli independence -- a nation and a people who have survived in the face of overwhelming odds. But even now, six decades since its founding, Israel continues to reside in a hostile neighborhood with adversaries who cling to the false hope that denying Israel's legitimacy will ultimately make it disappear. But those adversaries are wrong.

As the President said in Cairo, for the entire world to hear, the State of Israel "will not go away." As he said at the United Nations, nations "do the Palestinians no favors when they choose vitriolic attacks against Israel over constructive willingness to recognize Israel's legitimacy and its right to exist in peace and security."

So America's commitment to Israel will endure. And everyone must know that there is no space -- no space -- between the United States and Israel when it comes to Israel's security. Our commitment to Israel's security is unshakable. It is as strong as ever. This President and this Administration understands very well the environment -- regionally and internationally -- in which Israel and the United States must operate. We understand very well that for peace and stability in the Middle East, Israel must be secure.

The United States will never waiver in defense of Israel's security. That is why we provide billions of dollars annually in security assistance to Israel, why we have reinvigorated our consultations to ensure Israel's Qualitative Military Edge, and why we undertake joint military exercises, such as the Juniper Cobra ballistic missile defense exercise that involved more than 1,000 United States servicemen and women. We view these efforts as essential elements of our regional security approach, because many of the same forces that threaten Israel also threaten the United States.

I can also say from long experience that our security relationship with Israel is important for America. Our military benefits from Israeli innovations in technology, from shared intelligence, from exercises that help our readiness and joint training that enhances our capabilities and from lessons learned in Israel's own battles against terrorism and asymmetric threats.

Over the years, and like so many Americans -- like so many of you here tonight -- I've spent a great deal of time with my Israeli partners, including my friends in the IDF. These partnerships are deep and abiding. They are personal relationships and friendships based on mutual trust and respect. Every day, across the whole range of our bilateral relationship, we are working together for our shared security and prosperity. And our partnership will only be strengthened in the months and years to come.

In our pursuit of a two-state solution, we recognize that peace must be made by the parties and cannot be imposed from the outside. At the same time, we understand that the status quo is not sustainable. It is not sustainable for Israel's identity as a secure, Jewish, and democratic state, because the demographic clock keeps ticking and will not be reversed. The status quo is not sustainable for Palestinians who have legitimate aspirations for sovereignty and statehood. And the status quo is not sustainable for the region because there is a struggle between those who reject Israel's existence and those who are prepared to coexist with Israel -- and the status quo strengthens the rejectionists and weakens those who would live in peace.

Obviously, we are disappointed that the parties have not begun direct negotiations. The United States stands ready

to do whatever is necessary to help the parties bridge their differences and develop the confidence needed to make painful compromises on behalf of peace. As we do so, we will also strongly support the Palestinian Authority's efforts to develop its institutions from the ground up and call on other states, particularly in the region, to do their part to support the Palestinian Authority as well.

We also continue to call on all sides to avoid provocative actions, including Israeli actions in East Jerusalem and Palestinian incitement that fuel suspicion rather than trust.

As Secretary of State Clinton has said many times, "we believe that through good-faith negotiations, the parties can mutually agree to an outcome which ends the conflict and reconciles the Palestinian goal of an independent and viable state based on the '67 lines, with agreed swaps, and Israel's goal of a Jewish state with secure and recognized borders that reflect subsequent developments and meet Israel's security requirements."

So it is time to begin those negotiations and to put an end to excuses. It is time for all leaders in the region -- Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab -- to support efforts for peace. It is time for today's leader to demonstrate the courage and leadership of Anwar Sadat, King Hussein, and Yitzhak Rabin.

I want to conclude tonight by returning to some simple words that President Obama spoke in Oslo -- this is a "moment of challenge." And when it comes to the Middle East, it is a moment of many challenges.

It is the challenge of transitioning to full Iraqi responsibility for their future. In Afghanistan and beyond, is the challenge of defeating violent extremists who threaten us all. It is the challenge of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. It is the challenge of forging a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians as part of a comprehensive peace in the region. It is the challenge of realizing greater prosperity and opportunity for all who call the Middle East home.

Alone, any one of these would demand extraordinary patience and perseverance. Together, they will require a comprehensive and coordinated approach. This is the work that President Obama has undertaken. And this is the work we will continue to pursue in the months and years ahead ... not only for the sake of America's security, but for the world's.

Thank you all very much. ❖

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