

MICHAEL BLAKE FOR CONGRESS

U.S. - Israel Position Paper

By: Michael Blake, Congressional Candidate (NY-15)

The State of Israel is a beacon of hope in the Middle East. As a proud Bronxite - born and raised - I have deep and meaningful relationships with our fellow Jewish sisters and brothers. I understand the absolute priority in ensuring Israel remain that beacon, not just for the Middle East, but for the world.

As the only democracy in a region that faces perpetual conflict and instability, Israel and the United States share common values, ideals, and aspirations. Israel's safety, security, right to self-defense, and spirit of entrepreneurship borne out of a will to persist against all odds, are of paramount importance to me, to the United States and to the world. When I become a member of Congress from the 15th Congressional District in New York, representing the most diverse county in America, I will continue the commitment I have shown as a community leader, lay minister, Assemblymember and national Democratic official in ensuring that the U.S.-Israel relationship remains strong and bipartisan for generations to come. I will stand up against anti-Semitism and attempts to delegitimize Israel through the BDS movement, as I have already done as a co-sponsor of legislative resolution K705 in the New York State Assembly. It is imperative that the next member of Congress from the 15th District of New York - a seat which has not been vacant in thirty years - is a trusted and visionary ally. From my visits to Israel to my continued relationships here in the States, I believe I am uniquely positioned to serve in this capacity. America has no closer friend and ally in the Middle East than Israel, and I will do everything in my power to keep it that way.

I saw first-hand the kindred resiliency and entrepreneurial will between the American and Israeli people on my two trips to Israel. While there, I led the reading of the Sermon on the Mount and learned about The Knesset. I have been inspired by listening to entrepreneurs discuss Start Up Nation. I also saw the concern in the eyes of families as sirens went off. These experiences channeled my core values I developed here in the U.S., and allowed me to further internalize the remarkable bond between our two countries; that bond must continue to be strengthened from the communities in The Bronx to the halls of Congress. America has no closer friend and ally in the Middle East than Israel, and I will do everything in my power to keep it that way.

Shared Experience

As a Black man in America, I've always felt a special kinship with the Jewish community. Our communities have both experienced oppression and discrimination. In the 1960s, Jews and Blacks marched shoulder to shoulder in the south to create a fairer and more just society. We've both been the "other", and today, we both must remain vigilant in the face of hatred, bigoted tropes, and violence.

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I have always been a spiritual man. At a young age, I understood religion to be a path towards building strong familial and community bonds. I started preaching at the age of 13 and what has always made me feel connected in our faiths are the common cornerstones of doing what is just, bringing people together, and tikun olam. In recognizing our common convictions, we strengthen our society and further our commitments to our respective faiths.

On my trips with the American Israel Education Foundation (an affiliate of AIPAC) and with the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), I witnessed the fascinating political dynamics of the Knesset firsthand. I traveled near the Gaza Strip and tried to avoid danger spots near the Syrian border. While circumstances may vary, I can understand the emotional, mental and physical duress that occurs when you don't feel safe in your own land. The very idea of Israel demonstrates that the promise can be realized, and serves as an inspiration for all those who have kept the faith in the face of oppression and persecution.

I learned more about this unity while working on President Obama's campaigns and in his White House. President Obama regularly got us thinking about the best ways to bring communities together. We both believe that we should be able to pray in our places of worship, without worry of losing our lives due to discrimination, gun violence and anti-religious or hateful rhetoric. As a lay minister who is very active in social justice causes, this synergy is why it was so moving to me that President Obama was the first President to host Passover in the White House with some of his Jewish and Black staffers - because the story of the Exodus is universal in its meaning. I feel strongly that Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people - a group who fled persecution across the world, to achieve a dream that they held onto for more than 2,000 years. At the Western Wall, I could feel the connection that exists when the diverse crowd prays, speaking different languages - people of three different faiths had one unified belief that love and hope prevail over the darkness.

When spending time in Memphis in 2018, during the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and breaking bread with our Jewish sisters and brothers who reflected on marching with Brother King, I was reminded that in 2020 and beyond, we must remain united as a people to have a chance to prosper in the future. To me, this is more than sharing a few sentences on a piece of paper: it is a livelihood, a belief and demonstrated commitment given our shared values, responsibilities and vision.

Taking Action On Iran

We were reminded recently that Iran continues to represent a major geopolitical threat to the Middle East, to the U.S., and to the State of Israel. The Iranian regime supports terrorist organizations including Hamas and Hezbollah, calls for the destruction of Israel, and has a despicable record on human rights. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard is creating instability in countries across the Middle East.

As a member of Congress, my guiding principle on Iran will be to ensure that the regime does not develop a nuclear weapon - which would threaten Israel and threaten the balance of

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power in the Middle East. Coming from a military family household where my oldest brother is a retired U.S. Army Veteran, and serving as a member of the New York Assembly Veterans Committee, I understand firsthand that national security is a critical priority and that we cannot take lightly any country or regime seeking to bring division and destruction upon another group of people. This approach vis-a-vis Iran means supporting tough, necessary sanctions, working closely with our allies and the UN Security Council to limit the development of ballistic missile capabilities, and ensuring that the U.S. holds Iran accountable for any provocations meant to undermine Israel, and peace in the Middle East. It means creating long-term diplomatic plans that do not have sunset provisions.

I believe that continued economic and diplomatic pressure can persuade Iran to return to the negotiating table, and reach a new agreement that has permanent assurances Iran will abandon its nuclear ambitions. That agreement must also address Iran's ballistic missile development and its backing of terrorist organizations across the world – so that the regime cannot continue to sow instability and threaten its neighbors. Given the rhetoric and indecision from President Trump, it is critical to have members of Congress who are ready on day one when it comes to engaging on decisions of this magnitude. Taken together, my White House experience, New York State Assembly experience, continued international travel and collaboration with entities such as the Council on Foreign Relations, uniquely prepares me to be ready to be a present ally fighting for the security of Israel in the midst of global challenges and opportunities.

Opposing Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)

There is no doubt that anti-Semitism and anti-Israel bias play an important role in the BDS movement. As a member of Congress, a son of immigrants, and as an American citizen, I will oppose all efforts that seek to delegitimize Israel. Because anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are so closely linked, we must not tolerate the actions of the BDS movement, just as we do not tolerate racism and other forms of prejudice.

I was pleased to see nearly 400 Democrats and Republicans in the House come together in July 2019 to oppose BDS and support a two-state solution. Thanks to the leadership of allies over the years, such as Nily Rozic and Phil Goldfeder in the New York State Assembly, I co-sponsored K705, a legislative resolution that fiercely denounced and rejected the movement to boycott, divest, and sanction Israel.

In Congress, I will support bipartisan legislation including The Israel Anti-Boycott Act, and work with congressional colleagues and stakeholders in the private sector to make sure American companies are not threatened by the BDS movement. I will always stand up and speak out when people try to deny Israel's right to exist. Serving in Congress isn't just about casting votes, it's about using a microphone to state loudly and clearly what is right and what is wrong. I will state loudly and clearly that there is no place for anti-Semitism in the United States and around the world. When I travel the country and the district, meeting with diverse groups, I speak out publicly that anti-Israel rhetoric has no place anywhere. As a Black man in this country, after what we have endured for centuries and what I have personally endured via police brutality, I

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will not be silent while divisive language and actions are taken against the Israel people, the Jewish people, or anyone from anywhere.

The Road to Peace

Just as we fight to protect the Israeli people from terrorism and hostile countries, while preserving Israel as the safe and secure homeland for the Jewish people, we must also work towards a two-state solution – one where a Palestinian state can live peacefully alongside Israel. A two-state solution, where both sides respect one another and do not permit terrorism, is in the long-term security interests of Israel. It offers the best chance for lasting peace. But a two-state solution requires both sides to come to the table willing to make tough decisions in good faith. It requires that the Palestinian government acknowledges Israel's right to exist. In addition, I support continued aid to the Palestinian Authority, which in my view, will reduce terrorism and ensure the necessary conditions that can help lead us towards a two-state solution. When you visit Israel and you see firsthand the geopolitical dynamics at play, it becomes even more apparent that the road to peace goes through a two state solution.

As a member of Congress, I will work to ensure that negotiations happen directly between the Israelis and the Palestinians – and not through international organizations or other unilateral efforts. Moreover, the conversations around peace must be continual. We must recognize the ever-fluid international dynamics at play to ensure that peace remains the ultimate priority.

Military Support

Given that my oldest brother is a retired Sergeant First Class in the U.S. Army and as a former aide to President Obama, national and international security is critically important to me as a public servant. As a member of Congress, I will advocate for and vote to continue our foreign military assistance to Israel. In that regard, Israel and America have a symbiotic relationship - America works in tandem with Israel to develop the Iron Dome, which brings jobs to the States and helps keep Israel safe. I strongly support the \$38 billion Memorandum of Understanding which covers FY 2019 – FY 2028, as it is critical for the protection of the Israeli people from hostile neighbors. I also support funding to upgrade and expand missile and rocket defense systems, and ensure Israel maintains its qualitative military edge, because a strong and secure Israel is in the vital national security interest of the United States.

While we have made demonstrative strides, we still have work to do. As a member of Congress, I will fight to strengthen the bonds between the Black and Jewish communities, and the American people and the Israeli people.

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About Michael:

Michael Blake represents the 79th District of New York. Formerly, he served as an aide in the Obama Administration and currently serves as Democratic National Committee (DNC) Vice Chair. In April 2019, Mr. Blake announced his candidacy for New York's 15th Congressional District for the seat soon to be vacated by House Democrat José E. Serrano. He's currently running on a bold platform geared towards creating jobs for women and people of color, transforming public housing, significantly improving public education, and reforming criminal justice. To learn more about Michael Blake's platform and policy positions, please visit blakeforcongress.nyc.