

Wall Street Journal's Bret Stephens Speaks About the Future of Israel

Though the news about Israel that comes out of the Middle East can be depressing, Bret Stephens manages to keep a good sense of humor. Stephens is the *Wall Street Journal's* Deputy Editorial Page Editor and principal columnist on foreign affairs, and he spoke in Charlotte at a program sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte in November.

Right up front Stephens promised to deliver news about the Middle East that would depress and upset any supporters of Israel. Fortunately, he said it tongue in cheek with a smile. To start with he stated that the answer to the perennial question, "Is there any hope for peace?" is a resounding no.

He predicts that any talk will fail because the most that Israel can concede to is not enough for the Palestinians. Israel will

never give in on the Palestinian "right to return" and they will have a difficult time complying with Israel's request for no militarism. Ultimately, the real question is whether the Palestinians are prepared to accept Israel as a Jewish state. Again, unfortunately, the answer is generally no.

The reality on the ground is this: Hamas, controlling the Gaza Strip adjacent to Israel, is "the spear point of Iranian power." Egypt, which may not be an all-out ally of Israel, but has at least been tolerant and supportive under Mubarak, may change radically when Mubarak retires or dies. While grooming his son to take over a continued democratic and free Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood is gaining power, and may be the next regime for Israel to deal with there. Lebanon will likely see civil war between Hezbollah and the more moderate factions.

And then there is Iran, in the midst of enriching uranium, weaponizing it, and working on a delivery system, all while calling for the complete destruction of Israel.

Those are the realities, but there are some ideas floating around the area that are even worse, Stephens says. One of those is the worldwide notion that Israel must live up to an "A+" standard, no matter what happens. If Israel fails at something, the assumption is that there was malice aforethought, not that Israel may have made a mistake. "Those of whom everything is expected, nothing is forgiven; those of whom nothing is expected, everything is forgiven," Stephens quipped. Israel, he says, is the only nation expected to act like a "Christian" nation.

Finally, before he took questions, he did give the audience a glimmer of hope. There are



Bret Stephens with Jeff Epstein, chair of the JCRC.

ways to talk about Israel that are positive he said. He warned the listeners against "defending" Israel. "Go on the offensive instead," he recommends. "Talk about the good things Israel has done and point out the bad things that are being done in the rest of the Middle East."

"At least he warned us that it might be depressing and disap-

pointing," said one attendee. "But most of us still aren't about to give up on Israel."

Please join the Jewish Community Relations Council for its next event, February 3, at 7 PM in the Sam Lerner center for a discussion on the urgency of Iran's impending nuclear capabilities. ☆

The Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte Community Relations Council presents

THE THREAT OF A NUCLEAR IRAN

Thursday,
February 3, 2011
7:00 PM
Sam Lerner Center
for Cultural Arts

The threat of a nuclear Iran is a matter of the gravest concern and utmost urgency to the world. Indeed, preventing the regime in Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons is a defining issue of our time and it is imperative that the voices of all those who seek a more peaceful world are heard.

Join us as we cover the history of the issues at hand and focus on how we as Americans can address this urgent crisis.

PANEL:

- Jonathan Berkey**, Professor of Middle East History, Davidson College
- Dr. Jack Caravelli**, Former CIA and NSA, expert on nonproliferation and nuclear terrorism, and author of *Nuclear Insecurity* (2008)
- David Ibsen**, Policy and Coalitions Director, United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI)

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