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IRAN: For Obama, the road to Tehran leads through Jerusalem

Barely noted in the [reports about Monday's meeting](#) between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was a revealing exchange toward the end of the question-and-answer session with a small group of reporters.



The president was asked whether he agreed with Netanyahu's view that dismantling Iran's nuclear program and getting it stop supporting militant groups in the Levant was the first step toward a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Obama said while the charged atmosphere in the Middle East makes it tough for Israel to negotiate with its rivals, he viewed the situation the other way around.

Read the little-cited quotes below:

"If there is a linkage between Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, I personally believe it actually runs the other way. To the extent that we can make peace with the Palestinians -- between the Palestinians and the Israelis, then I actually think it strengthens our hand in the international community in dealing with a potential Iranian threat..."

... Imagine how much less mischief a Hezbollah or a Hamas could do if in fact we had moved a Palestinian-Israeli track in a direction that gave the Palestinian people hope? And if Hezbollah and Hamas [are] weakened, imagine how that impacts Iran's ability to make mischief, and vice versa."

Obama's view puts him at odds with Netanyahu [and his American allies](#) and in line with a group of other foreign policy wonks such as [Cato Institute scholar Leon Hadar](#), who recently penned an [analysis for the journal Foreign Affairs](#) that appeared to reflect Obama's opinion that the Palestinian question poses a greater threat to U.S. and Israeli interests than Iran. From Hadar:

"Obama must recognize that the main threat to Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state is not Iran but its conflict with the Palestinians -- a conflict that will continue to serve as a catalyst for growing anti-Israel and anti-American radicalization in the region at large unless and until it is resolved."

-- [Borzou Daragahi](#) in Beirut

Photo: A handout picture released by the Israeli government press office shows President Obama welcoming Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House on Monday. Credit: Moshe Milner / AFP/Getty Images

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