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[THE BIG QUESTION, May 18: Obama and the Middle East](#)

May 19th, 2009

The Big Question is a feature where influential lawmakers, pundits and interest group leaders give their answers to a question that's driving discussion in news circles around the country.

Some responses are gathered via e-mail, while others are gathered in person via tape recorder.

Today's Big Question is:

Will President Obama's policies toward Israel and Iran make Middle East peace more or less likely?

See responses below from Jeremy Ben-Ami of J Street and Leon Hadar of the Cato Institute.

[Read the last Big Question here.](#)

Jeremy Ben-Ami, Executive Director of [J Street](#), said:

The course President Obama is charting in the Middle East makes peace far more likely – while advancing US interests in the region and around the world.

First, the President sees ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a fundamental American interest. That makes him far more likely to provide the active leadership and hands-on engagement – both personally and on the part of his administration – that will be necessary for success.

Second, the President recognizes that this isn't simply a dispute between the two parties that they can settle themselves. He recognizes how important external leadership will be and he understands that other conflicts (Israel-Syria, Lebanon, Iran) need to be addressed through a broader regional strategy and with international engagement. His positive view of the Arab League peace initiative is refreshing and provides an opening not simply for a two-state solution, but a 22- or 57-state peace. [READ THE WHOLE RESPONSE HERE.](#)

Leon Hadar, Research Fellow at the [Cato Institute](#), said:

President Obama's new strategy towards Iran remains a work in progress. But the basic idea– the need to test Iran's intention through diplomatic means before embracing other policies–is clearly preferable to the notion promoted by neconservative critics and others, that only the threat of military force–and possibly its use –could lead to change in Iran's policies. It also sends a clear message to the Israeli government, that Washington is not providing Israel with a “green light” to attack Iran. From that perspective, the new administration's approach does contribute to a certain momentum in the direction of peace. [READ THE WHOLE RESPONSE HERE.](#)

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By **Michael O'Brien**

This entry was posted on Tuesday, May 19th, 2009 at 4:39 pm and is filed under [Politics](#).



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Sen. Wyden : The history of bringing about enduring change, change that is going to last, change that people are going to rally behind — that history is predicated on bringing people together. And Senator Bennett and I have always

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