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The former British Prime Minister answers questions from Seeds about his current work as Envoy of the Middle East Quartet

How does your role as the Quartet Envoy differ from your past position as British Prime Minister? (Rama, Gaza)

The biggest difference as far as the Middle East is concerned is that I now have a much greater understanding of the issues. As Prime Minister, I considered a resolution to this conflict to be vital, and I would come out and meet with leaders in both Israel and Palestine.

However, since becoming Quartet Representative I have had the opportunity to spend much more substantial amounts of time in the region and travel throughout the Palestinian Territories.

I have met with ordinary citizens,

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the business community and civil society, as well as with the politicians. I now have a much deeper knowledge of the issues and what needs to be done to change the facts on the ground and bring about the two state solution I believe people ultimately want.

What are the most important lessons you have learned from past negotiations, and how are you applying them to current efforts in Israel and Palestine? (Eitan, Washington, D.C.)

When I started out in the Northern Ireland peace process, both sides (Unionists and Republicans) told me that this was an age-old conflict and that it couldn't be solved because

the other side did not really want a resolution.

I have also heard that said many times here with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I believe an important lesson is to realise that the vast majority of ordinary Palestinians and Israelis, just like those in Northern Ireland, actually do want peace. So our job now is to provide the building blocks for that peace. I am sure if you ask both Palestinians and Israelis whether they support a two states solution they would say yes, but if you asked them whether they believed it could be realised soon, they would say no.

That is why it is crucial to develop an approach of building that peace from the bottom-up by improving the daily lives of ordinary people on

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both sides, in parallel with the top-down political process, and that is what I am promoting, as the Quartet Representative for the Middle East.

What is the hardest issue you’ve faced in all of your peace making efforts? (Bar, Tel-Aviv)

I think the hardest thing to do always is meet with those people who have been the victims of terrorism or violence. When I met with people who had lost family members to the IRA there were those who, for totally understandable reasons, would never accept that we should talk to those who had caused them such pain. But I knew that once they had truly accepted and endorsed a policy of non-violence, we had to include them in the process, however painful it was for those who had suffered so much.

Can you, in any way, help young Gazans pursue academic studies in Europe and the US? (Leith, Jerusalem)

I have said repeatedly that the current policy of blockading Gaza, and that includes the ban on Gazans leaving to pursue their studies abroad, is counterproductive and should be changed.

I have lobbied and continue to lobby the Israeli Government to change the policy on Gaza so that it does not punish the population.

I have asked the Israeli authorities to allow goods into Gaza, and have promoted several water and sanitation projects in Gaza.

Can, and should, Israelis and Palestinians be divided by a firm border, so that they do not interfere in each other’s affairs? (Farwa, Ramallah)



In the end, that is something for Israelis and Palestinians to decide upon. We are all striving to reach a two-state solution where a secure Israel can live in peace alongside a viable, independent Palestine, but it will be up to the parties themselves to agree the fine print, and I hope we can get the political negotiations underway shortly to achieve that.

Is it reasonable to expect Middle East peace before the Iranian nuclear issue is resolved? (Michael, Sharon, Mass.)

The Iranian nuclear issue is indeed of grave concern to many in the region and beyond and those concerns cannot and must not be neglected. However, both questions need to be resolved in their own right. So I would disagree with those who say we should set aside the Israeli-Palestinian conflict until the Iranian problem is resolved or vice versa. Indeed, I believe solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is crucial not just for Israelis and Palestinians, but is also crucial to removing the ability

of those such as the Iranian regime or groups like Al Qaeda to exploit the situation here to try and create regional instability or to justify unacceptable acts of terrorism.

Would you recommend instituting interfaith and international dialogue programs like your Faith Foundation on a larger scale throughout the Middle East? (Eitan, Washington, D.C.)

I think increasing understanding of other people’s point of view can only be a good thing, and that’s why dialogue is important.

That doesn’t mean that people will stop following their own faith tradition, and nor should it. But what it does mean is that we can demonstrate that whatever your faith or culture or race that ultimately people do want to live together side by side in peace, and dialogue can break down some of the barriers that make people doubt that shared vision for the future.

Do you think that Liverpool will take the Premiership this season? If not, which team do you think will win it? (Bar, Tel-Aviv)

I dare not speculate, as football can sometimes stir up greater emotions than politics, although one of my sons is a Liverpool fan, so he would want me to say yes.

I think Benayoun is doing well for them, but they will continue to face tough competition from the likes of Manchester United and Chelsea, and possibly also Manchester City this year.

Personally, I am a Newcastle fan, and all I can hope is that we return to the Premier League as quickly as possible!