

STAR♦PAC Key Questions for 2016 Federal Candidates

Seeking Peace in the Middle East

1. The US, UK, China, Russia, France and Germany and Iran have reached an historic agreement to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. The announced agreement significantly constrains Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief for Iran. Will you support this agreement? What lessons do you draw from this diplomatic approach to conflict resolution vs. military intervention?

I support the agreement, as I believe it has the best chance of limiting Iran's ability to produce a nuclear weapon, while avoiding yet another war in the region.

While I believe Iran must not be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon, I also believe that we have a legal and moral obligation to pursue diplomatic solutions before resorting to military solutions – especially after nearly fourteen years of ill-conceived and disastrous military engagements in the region.

That said, we must remain vigilant to make sure Iran complies with the agreement. Moreover, like many people, I do have concerns how Iran will utilize the unfrozen assets and new revenue from increased oil production, and I am under no naïve illusions that the accord will suddenly transform the behavior of the Iranian regime.

While the agreement is not perfect, it is far better than the path we were on – with Iran developing nuclear weapons and the potential for military intervention by the U.S. and Israel growing greater by the day. It is incumbent upon us give the negotiated agreement a chance to succeed.

2. Most analysts maintain that the Israel/Palestine conflict is a major cause of the broader turmoil in the Middle East. STAR♦PAC supports the American Friends Service Committee positions that resolution of this conflict pivots on these goals: non-violent self-determination for both Palestinians and Israelis, based on international humanitarian and human rights law; an end to the Israeli occupation and further settlement of Palestinian territories; and, recognition of Palestinian refugees' right of return. Do you support these goals? What specific policies would you endorse to advance attainment of these goals?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been one of the world's most difficult and intractable disputes for more than sixty years. Moreover, as AFSC notes, the failure to resolve the ongoing strife has helped fuel other conflicts in the region. It is critical to resolve this conflict in a peaceful way, one that recognizes the needs of both the Israeli and Palestinian people to live in security and with dignity.

The most recent violence in Israel and Gaza was a particularly contentious chapter in the dispute. At the time, I strongly condemned the use of violence and extrajudicial actions by both sides as a means for achieving their goals.

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I expressed deep concerns about the Israeli attacks that killed several thousand innocent civilians, and the bombing of neighborhoods, hospitals, schools and refugee camps. To my mind, while Israel has the right to defend itself, the attacks were disproportionate, and the widespread killing of civilians completely unacceptable.

I also strongly condemned indiscriminate rocket fire by Hamas into Israel, and the use of civilian neighborhoods to launch those attacks. Further, I am dismayed by Hamas' long held position that Israel does not have the right to exist. Clearly, there can be no hope for a lasting peace in the region if they maintain that view.

The U.S. must play a leading role in creating a permanent two-state solution, which will require significant compromises and sacrifice from both sides. The Palestinians must unequivocally recognize the state of Israel's right to exist and hold accountable those who have committed terrorist acts. The Israelis must end the economic blockade of Gaza, and cease developing settlements on Palestinian land. Both sides must negotiate in good faith regarding all other outstanding issues that stand in the way of a durable and lasting peace in the region.

3. Many Americans believe that we are less secure today than we were before 9/11. STAR♦PAC believes our military intervention over the fifteen years has created "blow back," motivating thousands to join a fight against our presence in their country or region. Do you agree? What steps do you propose to reduce the unintended consequences of military intervention?

There is no question that we have seen significant blow back from fifteen years of ill-conceived and disastrous military engagements in the Middle East. I am proud to have voted against the war in Iraq in 2003, as well as the first Persian Gulf War. Not only did we invade based on false information, but the war has radically destabilized the entire region and has been completely counterproductive in terms of fighting international terrorism. The cost at home has been tremendous, including the loss of close to 6,700 American troops, and hundreds of thousands gravely wounded service members. The cost in the Middle East has been even higher. Clearly, it is time for a new approach: war must be a last resort, not the first option.

4. The United Nations Security Council has established comprehensive strategies for dealing with international terrorism, including non-violent actions addressing underlying causes such as cultural and religious intolerance, failure to recognize human rights and the rule of law, and lack of economic development. Do you support the overall positions and role of the UN regarding terrorism? What exceptions, if any, would you make?

We live in a dangerous world full of serious threats, perhaps none more so than the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaeda. There is no question that we must defend ourselves against those who would do us harm, but we cannot combat international terrorism by alone nor simply by the same failed methods. We must

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work with our allies to root out terrorist funding networks, provide development support in the region, disrupt online radicalization, and support and defend religious liberties.

Controlling the Military/Industrial Complex

5. Former President and General Dwight Eisenhower warned, "...We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist." Do you agree with him? What must we do to cope with special interest pressures that have led us to spend as much on our military as the next nine countries combined?

I do agree with President Eisenhower. If we have any hope of implementing meaningful progressive reform of any kind – from a sane foreign policy, to a budget that is not balanced on the backs of working families and the most vulnerable in our society, to addressing the catastrophic consequences of climate change – we must radically reform our broken political system which is awash with secret pools of special interest money. I am proud to have never taken a dime of corporate PAC money, and I never will.

The place to start is by reversing the disastrous Citizens United and the more recent McCutcheon Supreme Court decisions that have opened the floodgates of almost unrestricted campaign spending. These decisions hinge on the absurd notion that giving large sums of money to a politician in exchange for influence and access does not constitute corruption. They also further shift political power to huge corporations and the wealthiest people in the United States.

6. Efforts are underway to amend the U.S. Constitution to state that inalienable rights belong to human beings only, so that corporate spending is not a form of protected free speech and can be regulated in election campaigns. Do you support such an amendment? Are there other actions you propose to overcome the impacts of the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision?

I don't just support a constitutional amendment to overturn these disastrous Supreme Court decisions, I authored and introduced the "Democracy is for People" amendment that would prevent corporations from bankrolling election campaigns and would make it clear that the ability to make campaign contributions and expenditures – just like the right to vote – belongs only to real people. Moreover, if elected President, I would make opposition to Citizen's United a litmus test for any Supreme Court nominee.

Ultimately, if we are ever going to address the corrupting influence of money on our elections, then we need to move toward publicly funded elections and strict campaign finance laws that prevent big money interests from wielding undue power in our democracy.

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7. War and military action have led to gigantic military expenditures and huge obligations in future budgets to service debt and provide crucial care for our veterans. Do you support reducing U.S. military spending and increasing spending for urgent social and human needs? What spending cuts or tax increases do you propose accomplish this change in priorities?

In a different speech, in 1953, President Eisenhower said “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.” Those powerful words ring no less true today.

Yet, there are many in Washington who say that because of the \$18 trillion national debt, we must cut Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, education, nutrition, and virtually every program that benefits working families, the elderly, veterans, children, and the most vulnerable Americans. However, their concerns about deficits disappear when it comes to defense spending.

The Republican budget resolution that passed earlier this year not only spared the Pentagon from the draconian cuts that domestic programs were subjected to, but it contained an *additional* \$38 billion stashed away in a slush fund known as the Overseas Contingency Operations fund.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon cannot account for the money and equipment it has. It suffers from chronic cost overruns. It wastes billions of taxpayer dollars each year on obsolete parts, inventory it does not need, and exotic weapons systems – many of which are designed to meet non-existent Cold War threats.

Outright fraud and corruption among private defense contractors accounts for billions more. A 2011 report that I requested showed the Pentagon paid more than \$573 billion over a ten-year period to more than 300 contractors involved in civil fraud cases. When the awards of parent companies are counted, the Pentagon paid more than \$1.1 trillion over ten years to the top 37 companies engaged in fraud.

We can and must make judicious cuts to military spending without compromising national security. We must audit the Pentagon. We must clamp down on waste, fraud, and corruption among defense contractors. We must spend our defense dollars more wisely, by reforming the procurement process and revisiting the need for Cold War-era weapons systems. We must focus more on maintaining the combat readiness of the far more cost-effective citizen soldiers of the National Guard, who also serve their states in times of need. And we must move away from unilateral military actions that have cost the American people trillions of dollars and thousands of lost lives.

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8. Do you support reducing the US military bases and other presence in foreign countries?

Yes, it is time that we re-evaluated our overseas military presence. However, I am not prepared to say at this time what bases in what countries I would close. But it is clear that we cannot, and should not be the world's policeman, and our overseas footprint must reflect that reality.

9. U.S. response to international terrorism has led to escalating tactics by our federal government, with growth in domestic surveillance, "enhanced interrogation," and lethal uses of unmanned drone aircraft outside of declared war zones. Do you agree that these practices should be restricted or curtailed? How would you address this area of concern?

While we must aggressively pursue terrorists who would do us harm, we must do it in a way that protects civil liberties and upholds the core values that make us proud to be Americans.

I voted against the Patriot Act in 2001, and I opposed the USA Freedom Act this past spring because it did not go far enough to rein in the out-of-control National Security Agency. We must end the indiscriminate bulk collection of phone records. If we allow the government to see all of what we read, what we watch and what we hear, then we cannot be called a free society.

Similarly, the U.S. must never again engage in torture as a matter of official policy. In an increasingly brutal world, our use of torture simply means that we lost our moral standing to condemn other nations or groups that engage in uncivilized behavior. That is why I recently voted to reaffirm the prohibition on waterboarding, sleep deprivation and other extreme techniques during interrogation.

We must also close the Guantanamo Bay detention center, now. The continued existence of this camp, and the misguided policies that led to its creation, damages the United States' moral standing, undermines our foreign policy, and fans the flames of terrorism rather than deter it.

10. Do you support the principle of pre-emptive military intervention? Under what circumstances would you order a military campaign in another nation that has not declared war on the United States, and what constraints would you apply to the campaign?

I believe military intervention should be a last resort, not a first option. I think any military action should come only after all diplomatic efforts have been exhausted, and we have worked with our allies and the international community at large to build a coalition with multilateral support. When military force is used, every effort must be made to ensure the campaign is limited in scope, authorized by Congress, respects the rules of humanitarian law including proportionality, and takes all measures possible to avoid civilian casualties. As explained earlier, I support the

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Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action the P5 + 1 nations negotiated with Iran, precisely because it is a model for resolving conflict through negotiation and diplomacy, even though there are many in Washington who favor launching military strikes to achieve the same goals.

I also believe it is imperative that the United States supports the United Nations' role as an arbiter of world peace and as a forum for international problem-solving. The U.S. cannot and should not be policeman to the world. Whenever possible and feasible, we should help provide the necessary support to the United Nations to carry out effective peacekeeping and humanitarian missions around the world. Meeting our funding commitments to the United Nations supports international peace and fosters international security, and by doing so, protects our interests at home and abroad. It is a wise investment.

11. Do you support extending arms control policies to include efforts to end proliferation of conventional weapons, which often are captured and reused by enemies of the U.S.?

The global trade of conventional weapons is worth more than \$70 billion, yet there are no internationally agreed upon standards to ensure that arms are transferred legally and responsibly. There is no doubt in my mind that the ready availability of weapons has directly led to political destabilization as well as human suffering and repression among civilian populations in Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Congo, and many other countries.

Civilians now make up more than 80 percent of all casualties in conflict zones, and 90 percent of those casualties are caused by small arms. Moreover, those very weapons are in many cases endangering American soldiers.

The U.N. Arms Trade Treaty would establish standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms. By slowing the flow of arms to conflict regions, the treaty will help deprive human rights abusers, warlords, and dictators of the weapons they use to commit abuses.

I firmly believe that the U.S. must be an active participant in discussions regarding conventional arms export policies, including the U.N. Arms Trade Treaty and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. When that treaty came into effect in 1983, it applied just to incendiary weapons, mines and booby-traps, and weapons designed to injure through very small fragments. Since then, provisions have been added to include additional weaponry. I support extending these provisions with the aim of further reducing civilian casualties, as well as inhumane suffering of combatants.

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12. Would you support a global campaign for full nuclear disarmament, including the U.S. unilaterally discontinuing building further nuclear weapons? Which allies would you consider urging reductions in their nuclear weapons?

The U.S. must redouble its efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation, and to promote nuclear disarmament. This is a position I have long held, having strongly supported a 1982 local referendum while I was Mayor of Burlington, Vermont, to back a nuclear weapons freeze by the U.S. and Soviet governments. That year, 159 out of 180 Vermont town meetings voted for the “Freeze.”

As a U.S. Senator, I strongly supported the 2010 ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between the U.S. and Russia, to substantially reduce the number of deployed nuclear weapons and delivery systems in both countries. And, I have repeatedly spoken out about the need to abide with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as well as push for a global ban on nuclear weapons testing.

As president, I will do everything I can to rid the world of these devastating weapons. We owe it to our children to leave them a world that is safer than the one we inherited, and that includes the threat of nuclear war.

Providing Humane Treatment of Migrants

13. Globally, millions of people are refugees, forced to emigrate because of war or the threat of violence in their homelands. Migrants often face desperate living conditions, abuse from criminals, and detainment. Does the United States have a national interest in addressing these areas of concern? What specific policy recommendations do you have to address this crisis?

As is often said, we are a nation of immigrants. For generations, families braved treacherous paths, often fleeing unspeakable poverty and violence, in search of better futures, for better lives for their children. We as a nation have got to realize the importance of dealing not just with the issue of immigration but with the very real refugee crisis we face. It was appalling to me that last year, when the papers were full of discussion of the large numbers of unaccompanied children at the borders, there were so many voices insisting they be turned away or simply shipped back to their country of origin like a package marked “return to sender.” Instead of demonizing these children, we must make sure they are humanely cared for while in U.S. custody. And, we must address the root causes of the crisis, including the fact that these children are fleeing economic despair, criminal violence, and false rumors of amnesty spread by the very people who profit by trafficking children.

America has always been a haven for the oppressed. We cannot and must not shirk the historic role of the United States as a protector of vulnerable people fleeing persecution. Our policies need to reflect the dangers that refugees are facing, and to protect them from those dangers.

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We must provide adequate federal support for schools and communities that have large immigrant populations, by significantly increasing funding for language instruction for limited English proficient and immigrant students. And we must reward and support communities that have agreed to resettle refugees, by significantly increasing funding for the HHS' Office of Refugee Resettlement grant programs.

14. Approximately eleven million migrants are in this country without authorization, thousands are detained, and thousands more have died while trying to cross borders. Do you support changes which would provide an orderly and humane process to recognize aspiring citizens? What changes would you support for our current immigration policies?

Our immigration system is broken, and it is long past time to fix it. Comprehensive immigration reform must begin with implementing a responsible path to citizenship for the more than 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. They should be given the opportunity to come out of the shadows, have the full protection of the law – including workplace safety and wage and hours protections – pay into Social Security and Medicare, and contribute to the American economy.

I am a strong supporter of the DREAM Act, which would offer the opportunity of permanent residency and eventual citizenship to young people who were brought to the United States as children. It is my belief that we should recognize the young men and women who comprise the DREAMers for what they are – American kids who deserve the right to legally be in the country they know as home.

Until we can pass comprehensive reform, we must be aggressive in pursuing policies that are humane and sensible and that keep families together. This includes taking measures that are currently available, including reforms through executive action. I strongly support the Obama Administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA a good first step, but should be expanded. Deferred action should include the parents of citizens, parents of legal permanent residents, and the parents of DREAMERS. We should be pursuing policies that unite families – not tear them apart. I will continue the current Administration's executive actions and aggressively pursue comprehensive immigration reform through statutory change.