

## **Summer Internship 2015: Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations**

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Founded in 1956 to be a voice of consensus for the United States government gauging a diversified American Jewish political landscape, the Conference of Presidents, now under the leadership of Stephen M. Greenberg, Chairman, and Malcolm I. Hoenlein, Executive Vice Chairman/CEO, has expanded its representation of 51 major American Jewish organizations into a global mission to advocate for Jewish and American interests in the political and social realms.

The Justus and Karin Rosenberg Foundation similarly strives to “combat antisemitism and anti-Israel activity on campus, antisemitic hate crimes, Holocaust denial, antisemitic discourse, state-sponsored antisemitism, and other issues that have a direct impact on the growth of hatred and antisemitism.” My internship at the Conference of Presidents heavily focused on anti-Israel activity, anti-Semitic discourse, and state-sponsored anti-Semitism.

### **REMARKS ON OBSERVATIONS**

In the summer of 2015, the Presidents’ Conference was heavily involved in advocating against the historic July 14<sup>th</sup> Iran Deal by citing threats to national security, American and Western world influence, and the safety and political stability in the Middle East. The Conference arrived at its conclusion via a thorough analysis of the terms detailed in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and many discussions held with member organizations, the American government, foreign policy experts, and the Israeli government. According to a September joint statement, the vast majority of member organizations were either against or unconvinced of the Iran Deal while a handful approved. Due to the nonuniform opinions among the member organizations, the Conference did not officially publish a joint statement of disapproval. The Conference leadership nonetheless concluded that it was necessary to urge Congress to vote down the deal in the interests of American national security, American foreign policy credibility, and Middle Eastern security - especially Middle Eastern security pertaining to the State of Israel.

The reasons for opposition were many: A secretive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)-Iran inspection regime that is unchecked and unregulated by interested and threatened parties; legitimization of Iranian nuclear development with no repercussions other than snapback sanctions to likely be enacted for major offenses only thereby ignoring minor offenses; legalization of unregulated Iranian nuclear power in 15 years (fewer with successful cheating schemes); Shahab-3 and intercontinental missiles (ICBMs) designed to fit nuclear warheads; and \$150 billion plus released sanctions to the State Department’s declared world leader in terrorism openly sworn to the demise of the United States and destruction of Israel. For these reasons the Conference declared the deal as both ineffective and harmful to United States’ and global interests, with particular detriment to the United States’ relationship with one of its closest allies Israel, as well as with moderate Sunni nations.

The Presidents’ Conference felt that Iran would return to the negotiating table to prove to the West its reliability, capitalize on Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s accusations of America’s “arrogance” and “untrustworthiness” to use as leverage for political sympathy, and,

ultimately, due to its battered, wearied, and dilapidated domestic economy greatly in need of international trade. The United States, with an economy colossally larger and more influential in world trade than Iran's, would then reinstate sanctions and cause national economic sectors, including the P5+1, to choose exclusively between business with the massive United States economy or a heavily sanctioned and decrepit Iran. The threat would return the Iran Deal and participating nations to the negotiations.

To achieve its goal, the Presidents' Conference met with President Barack Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry, and other political and influential leaders in attempts to convince the Obama Administration and Kerry negotiating team to redesign the Iran Deal.

## **ACTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES**

My main, steady duties revolved around the production of Malcolm Hoenlein's weekly segment on the WABC John Batchelor radio show which reaches over 1 million viewers nationwide. Each week I was assigned different foreign policy experts from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, American Enterprise Institute, and Hudson Institute, journalists, United States and Israeli politicians, and public intellectuals to research and study their investigations and analyses on foreign affairs, with special focus on Iran. On occasion I was involved in the contacting process, as well, which entailed e-mailing and/or phoning the interviewees and scheduling available time slots and means of communication for the live radio broadcast.

In addition to reviewing their assessments, I was responsible for researching other analyses from foreign affairs and policy journals and articles from across the media. I then scripted in-depth radio interview questions and discussion points for the interviewees. Among those experts, leaders, and thinkers who I researched and prepared interviews for were Olli Heinonen (Former Deputy Director-General for Safeguards at the IAEA), Michael Doran (Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute), Avi Issacharoff (Middle East Analyst for The Times of Israel), Dore Gold (Israel Foreign Ministry Director-General), Robert Satloff (Executive Director of the Washington Institute), Ambassador Dennis Ross (Fellow at the Washington Institute), Representative Eliot Engel (New York), and Ron Prosor (Israel's Former Permanent Representative to the United Nations).

The radio show interviewed said authorities and critics on Iran, ISIS, Turkey-Kurds relations, and United States involvement in the Middle East. Of heavy interest was Israel and her challenging neighborhood and inaccurate and prejudiced global image depicting her as a genocidal nation bent on war. The current events and policy analyses elicited from these interviews informed the American public of the deeply existential bond of values and trust intrinsic in the United States-Israel relationship – a trust representing and advocating democracy, peace, and tolerance, as well as combating terror and anti-West sentiment. The show revealed Israel as the lone democracy in a dangerous neighborhood mixed with anti-democratic nations and terrorist groups intertwined in their boldly stated mission of Israel's destruction.

In addition to the assignment of preparing Mr. Hoenlein for his radio show, I edited and dispatched Conference of Presidents press releases, official letters, and invitations for meetings with experts, officials, and politicians in various venues, many of them pertaining to statements and actions that treated Israel unfairly. One such example was the effort to reprove Stephane Richard, the chairman of the French company Orange Telecommunications, for saying he'd be in favor of severing ties with Israel "tomorrow" – remarks seen as supporting the Boycott,

Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS) against Israel. Mr. Richard subsequently flew to Israel where he apologized, saying “I regret deeply this controversy, and I want to make totally clear that Orange as a company has never supported and will never support any kind of boycott against Israel.”

Furthermore, I was frequently tasked with researching and collating news reports, statistics, and analyses on Middle Eastern Affairs for meetings and presentations, as well as given responsibilities to record minutes, transcribe notes, and disseminate proceedings, summaries, and transcriptions for office or participant use. The data gathered was typically background information with basic facts and current events. The purpose was for Mr. Hoenlein to be aware of any recent material for discussion. These meetings often involved Israel’s precarious security situation.

## **REFLECTIONS**

I feel fortunate to have been a part of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and directly involved in its mission in the summer of 2015. More than the gains in knowledge on the Iran Deal, Israel’s security, and anti-Semitism, I developed a deep appreciation for the beauties and privileges afforded to me in this great United States of America, a sense of the complexities involved in navigating world politics, and a more profound understanding of my connection with the State of Israel, Nation of Israel, and Religion of Israel.