

Former Senator Bob Graham calls for ‘urgency of movement’ on Arab-Israeli conflict

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Resolving the Mideast conflict is crucial to preventing further proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, said former US Senator Bob Graham during a lecture at AUB on April 15, 2010.

“There is no issue more central to the likelihood of Weapons of Mass Destruction being used in the next three years than ... the dispute in the Middle East,” Graham told an AUB audience that included US Ambassador Michele Sisson and Graham's wife, Adele, as well as AUB faculty members and students.



Graham argued that unless significant changes are made, a terrorist group will likely use WMDs in the next few years.

“The characteristics of our adversary are changing,” said Graham. Today, there is a franchise -- a “McDonalds” -- of terrorism, with a franchise in 50 countries, he added.

Graham started his lecture, entitled, “From 9/11 to Obama: U.S. Relations with the Muslim World,” by referring to the positive role AUB has played, and continues to play, in relations between the United States and Lebanon.

Co-sponsored by the Center for American Studies (CASAR), the Issam Fares Institute for Policy Studies and International Affairs (IFI), and the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at AUB, Graham's talk highlighted the importance of the peace process in preventing violence and terrorism. "This should be the motivation to accord urgency of movement on this conflict," he said, referring to the peace process.

Graham commended Obama's enthusiasm for starting the peace process "almost on the first day he was in office," unlike his predecessors, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, who waited too long to initiate a plan to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

While he acknowledged that the question of timing is critical, Graham also emphasized the need to recognize that the United States is still considered the most influential and honest peace broker in the Middle East, something which—in Graham's view—Obama fully realizes.

In fact, Graham added that Obama's June 2009 speech in Cairo, entitled, “New Beginnings,” was a milestone in U.S.-Arab relations, as it had allowed the Obama administration to garner a new level of confidence from Arabs. In that speech, the US president had acknowledged the contributions of the Arab culture to the world.

However, while the role of the United States is indispensable, it is up to all parties in the region to refrain from violence for the peace process to succeed, said Graham.

It is hoped that “we can give this culturally indispensable region of the world an opportunity to live in peace in this and in future generations,” concluded Graham.

Graham's talk also overviewed the main findings of the Commission for the Prevention of the Proliferation of WMD and Terrorism. These findings, said Graham, show that the US is more vulnerable today than it was shortly after 9/11. Moreover, the superpower is not paying as close attention to the threat of biological weapons as it does with respect to nuclear weapons, even though scientists can now turn biological materials into weapons.

Following Graham's talk, US Ambassador Michelle Sisson commented on the sidelines: "The talk is...a terrific example of how all of us Americans really want to portray America as open." Sisson added that Graham came to AUB for an open exchange with students and faculty members.

Senator Bob Graham is the former two-term governor of Florida, who served 18 years in the United States Senate. He was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1986, serving three consecutive terms. One of his most important contributions came during his last term, when he was named Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. He co-sponsored the bill to create the Director of National Intelligence position and co-chaired the "Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001."

Graham co-authored, *Intelligence Matters* (2004), in which he analyzes the run-up to the Iraq war. Graham was one of the few senators who voted against the war in Iraq.

In 2005, the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, rebuilt when Graham was Governor, was renamed Bob Graham Sunshine Skyway Bridge by the Florida Legislature. In 2006, during the commencement exercises for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the University of Florida awarded Bob Graham an honorary doctorate, namely, the Doctor of Public Service.

Graham remains active in politics, currently serving on the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission.