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# Obama: US backs Israel, sympathizes with Palestinians

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<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=257539> <sup>[1]</sup>

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US President Barack Obama said on Thursday that the United States would always ensure Israel's security but that Washington must also pay attention to the plight of the Palestinians.

The president, speaking at a town-hall meeting on various issues, was responding to a question about why, if the US truly supports human rights, it has not called out Israel and Egypt for abuses against Palestinians, apparently in reference to the blockade of Gaza.

"Last night in your State of the Union address, you spoke of America's support for human rights," said a university student, who added that she worked on Obama's campaign last year. "Then why have we not condemned Israel and Egypt's human rights violations against the occupied Palestinian people? We continue to support [Israel and Egypt] financially, with billions of dollars coming from our tax dollars."

In response, Obama said the issue "elicits a lot of passions." "Here's my view: Israel is one of our strongest allies," he said. "It is a vibrant democracy, that shares links with us in all sorts of ways. It is critical for us, and I will never waver from ensuring Israel's security and helping them secure themselves in what is a very hostile region. So I make no apologies for that.

"What is also true is that the plight of the Palestinians is something that we have to pay attention to, because it is not good for our security and it is not good for Israel's security if you've got millions of individuals who feel hopeless, who do not have an opportunity to get an education, or get a job, or what have you," he said.

Obama said that the US is "seeking a two-state solution, in which Israel and the Palestinians can live side by side in peace and security. In order to do that, both sides are going to have to make compromises. As a first step, the Palestinians are going to have to unequivocally renounce violence and recognize Israel. And Israel has to acknowledge legitimate grievances

and interests of the Palestinians."

'They're divided'

He said both sides shared responsibility over the lack of negotiations, for which Obama speculated domestic politics were to blame.

"Both in Israel and the Palestinian territories, the politics are difficult," he said. "They're divided. The Israeli government came in based on the support of a lot of folks who don't want to make a lot of concessions. I think Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu was actually making some effort to try to move a little bit further than his coalition wants him to go.

"On the other hand, President [Mahmoud] Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, who I think genuinely wants peace, has to deal with Hamas, an organization that has not recognized Israel and has not disavowed violence. So, we are working to strengthen the ability of both parties to sit down across the table and begin serious negotiations."

But Obama said that "it's important when we're talking about this issue to make sure we don't just knee-jerk, use language that is inflammatory, or in some fashion discourages negotiations. We've got to recognize that both the Palestinian people and the Israelis have legitimate aspirations that can be best served if the United States helps both sides to understand each other rather than demonize each other."

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