



# American Task Force on Palestine

## A Decade of Achievement: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about ATFP

### - Introduction

The founding mission of the American Task Force on Palestine (ATFP) was, and remains, to impact decision-making in Washington on the importance of a two-state solution to the [American national interest](#). Having just completed its [first decade](#) of work advocating for peace and Palestine, and embarking on its second decade, ATFP is issuing the following detailed set of explanations of exactly what it is, what it does and why. They are also intended to highlight and explicate [ATFP's accomplishments](#) during its first decade, which have far exceeded its expectations at its founding 10 years ago.

The format of this informational overview, for convenience and clarity, is a set of answers to [frequently asked questions](#) (FAQs). While such questions range from the fundamental and profound to the ridiculous and outrageous, these answers -- both individually and as a whole -- are intended to explicate, clarify and illuminate ATFP's groundbreaking approach to pro-Palestine advocacy, which is primarily aimed at accessing and influencing the American policymaking and framing debates.

During its inaugural decade, ATFP focused almost all of its activities, energy, attention, and carefully-chosen battles to establishing and maintaining our standing, access and, indeed, influence within this policy conversation and with our own government on questions pertaining to Palestine. ATFP's approach was best defined by the title of our first collection of Task Force documents published in 2007: [Principles and Pragmatism](#). ATFP is guided by a set of ethical principles -- particularly regarding its own veracity, consistency and independence of decision-making -- and pragmatism -- which involves a clear-headed recognition of the core political, social and economic realities within which we work. These realities prompt ATFP to constantly strive to find innovative ways of pursuing our mission of advocating Palestinian statehood despite the numerous and complex constraints with which our small, but politically and intellectually robust, organization must contend. Pragmatism is essential to advancing any agenda, but it is especially required in the highly charged and sensitive challenge of advocating for Palestine in Washington.

The primary purpose of ATFP's founding strategy was the accumulation, preservation and extension of its credibility within, and even more importantly its relevancy to, the Washington policymaking and policy framing processes related to Palestine. ATFP was established in 2003 in a context in which recognition of the American national interest in the creation of a state of Palestine was by no means the consensus it has subsequently become.

The project was obviously daunting. Yet ATFP was convinced that the right approach to engagement could win Palestinian and Arab Americans a seat at the policy table, just as countless other American ethnic groups, constituencies and varied interest groups had earned over the years. We discovered -- even more than we had anticipated, and in direct contradiction to what some assumed, and many continue to insist still is, an irrefutable certainty of exclusion -- that we were not standing plaintively in front of an impenetrable barricade. Instead, we found ourselves pushing on a door that opened widely and welcomed our entry. The typical reaction of the Washington establishment to the presence of ATFP was not "what are you talking about" but rather "where have you been?"

The first, and most crucial, element to ATFP's program to develop the standing to facilitate its participation in the single most politically complicated of American foreign policy issues -- Israel and Palestine -- was integrity. Integrity, by its very definition, is a holistic quality. It requires the organization and its leadership to adhere to the best practices of institutional professionalism at every level. It requires moral clarity and political consistency. It necessitates saying the same thing to all audiences and interlocutors in every language, any venue and each medium. It does not allow for doublespeak, which is one of the most deeply rooted and damaging negative Western stereotypes about Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular. Nor does it afford space for convenient, comfortable ambiguity.

Integrity means that when there are difficult choices to be made, they are not avoided but addressed honestly, publicly, forthrightly and with full acceptance of all of the ramifications, good and bad. Integrity means having the courage to face those choices, make them with as much seriousness, wisdom and prudence as possible, and remaining steadfast in the face of any personal and political costs. Courage and consistency are the most crucial elements of integrity. Adopting popular or ambiguous, cost-free positions does nothing to establish political credibility. But making bold and principled choices, in the face of significant costs, is essential to establishing integrity. Respect, trust and standing must all be earned and maintained precisely through such tough choices and a consistently principled and pragmatic approach.

The most difficult choices facing the Task Force involved the development of an innovative approach to pro-Palestinian advocacy in Washington. The most important of these was, and remains, an emphasis on the American national interest as the paramount guide to all of our advocacy work. The Task Force decided that, if its primary aim was to have the greatest possible impact on policy, its primary constituency and the main target of its messaging must, perforce, be the institutions and individuals that

make and inform policy. From its outset, ATFP has sought to help mainstream Palestine, Palestinians and Palestinian Americans in the Washington policy conversation, and in our broader national American society and culture.

Another key choice ATFP faced had to do with its attitudes towards Israel and its relationship with the mainstream Jewish-American community. ATFP was crystal-clear, from the beginning, while it categorically opposes the occupation that began in 1967, it does not oppose the State of Israel. The *raison d'être* of the organization is ending the occupation and creating a state of Palestine to live alongside Israel in peace, security and dignity. ATFP noted that major American policy consensuses are invariably the product of unlikely coalitions of political forces that may agree on little else. Effective major policy interventions require the slow, painstaking and difficult development of broad coalitions -- and often counterintuitive alliances -- that agree on a particular foreign or domestic policy goal or orientation. ATFP therefore has sought, from its outset, to build the broadest possible American coalition in favor of a two-state solution.

This has meant not only outreach to Arab and Muslim American organizations, but also many other groups with a strong interest in US foreign policy including advocacy, lobbying, think tank, academic, religious and political associations. The most important, perhaps, and certainly most innovative, aspect of ATFP's outreach efforts has been aimed at Jewish-American organizations, running almost the entirety of the ideological spectrum. ATFP has openly and deliberately developed its relationships with the mainstream Jewish-American organizations, institutions and individuals that are open to the prospect of a two-state solution. Arab and Jewish Americans do not, and may never, share the same narrative about Israel and Palestine, or the Middle East in general, among other issues. But, for different reasons, they share, or should share, a common goal: a conflict-ending two-state solution between Israel and Palestine. And no two American constituencies are more engaged with, and committed to, Israeli-Palestinian issues than the Arab- and Jewish-American communities.

Hence Jewish Americans who understand Israel's need for the establishment of a Palestinian state -- if it is to remain in any recognizable sense "Jewish" or "democratic" - - are the logical and necessary, even if counterintuitive, allies and partners for Palestinian and Arab Americans seeking to end the occupation and create an independent Palestinian state. Building bridges of understanding and common purpose across this long-standing and well-established divide has been not easy or cost-free on either side. Deep-seated suspicions are difficult to overcome, and there are considerable political, institutional, social, psychological and personal costs attached to both Arab and Jewish Americans who seek a serious conversation and are open to not merely a dialogue but potentially a partnership for peace.

ATFP's approach has also meant taking a series of independent, and occasionally controversial, policy positions that at times break with traditional and familiar attitudes. These begin, but certainly do not end, with everything that flows from emphasizing our commitment to the American national interest. Such differences are also an inevitable byproduct of our determination to face and make the hard choices when we are

confronted with them. ATFP does not fudge issues, remain ambiguous or deploy messaging that either explicitly or implicitly presents different positions to different audiences. The Task Force is only accountable to its Board of Directors, but -- given the fact that many of its policy positions are innovative in either substance or messaging -- it has frequently found itself misrepresented or misunderstood.

Even when its policies are correctly characterized in the Arab-American conversation, the Task Force often finds itself paying a significant political, social, institutional and individual price for the new approaches to an old problem -- ending the occupation -- that it has developed and pursued. ATFP, its Board and staff, do not relish vitriolic attacks or harsh condemnations, although we welcome honest and respectful dialogue. But the Task Force has understood from the outset that some of its key ideas and approaches were likely to prove controversial in some circles -- including within its own Board -- and it has been willing to pay this price because it believes it to be the unavoidable cost of success for its mission. We do not expect everyone to agree with us. On the contrary, we welcome open debate. And we hope that these answers to FAQs will help promote that debate, familiarize more people with ATFP as a model of political and advocacy engagement especially at the level of policy, and contribute more of our perspective to the community conversation.

ATFP's innovative, low-key, high-impact approach to policy work in Washington on behalf of Palestine has been the subject of vociferous criticism, particularly from the pro-Israel extreme right and the pro-Palestinian ultra left, both of which reject compromise and a two-state solution. They also typically, take inflexible positions that allow no space for alternative perspectives. Their deep ideological convictions do not allow for disagreement and they tend to personalize the debate rather than engage at the level of ideas.

ATFP's successes in developing its organizational stature, credibility and presence in Washington, and participation in the national conversation at the highest political levels about Middle East policy over the past 10 years, mean that the organization is now in a better position to spend more of its scant resources, time and energy on explaining what it is and what it does, and why, to broader public constituencies, particularly the Palestinian and Arab-American communities. As we enter our second decade of work on behalf of Palestine and peace in the American national interest, we are determined to no longer allow other, frequently hostile, voices to define us in the public imagination and popular discourse.

This explanatory overview is neither meant to be exhaustive, nor is it an essay or issue paper. Instead it is a resource for understanding and explaining the Task Force -- what it believes and says and what it doesn't, and what it does and doesn't do -- that is organic and will be systematically updated, particularly as new questions and/or answers arise. Each individual answer stands alone, and can be read individually. But, as a whole, while of necessity somewhat repetitious in places, it is also by far the most comprehensive guide of ATFP's beliefs, activities, perspectives and outlook. It is, in effect, a reference resource to the American Task Force on Palestine.

We hope that, taken as a whole, these statements, along with the rest of the work of ATFP, can help to explain and promote an important, demonstrably effective model for Palestinian and Arab American engagement in the US political system. ATFP has never, does not, and does not aspire, to claim to speak on behalf of these communities. Nor does ATFP argue or believe that it has developed or discovered the only plausible or effective approach to Palestinian and Arab American advocacy. Instead, ATFP hopes that its experiences, successes and failures, and innovations, are but one model among others, for serious, purposive and effective engagement for Palestine in the American political system.

ATFP is a vehicle and asset for those Palestinian and Arab Americans who wish to make use of it. And it can serve as an exemplar for those who want to emulate or elaborate on its approach through organizations or initiatives of their own. Others who chose a different path should make use of the openness of the American political system to advance their own agendas. The single greatest asset belonging to the Palestinian- and Arab-American communities is our citizenship in by far the most powerful country in the world, which is also a free society that imposes no structural, legal or practical barriers to our own participation as fully engaged Americans. Anyone can assert their rights to full, equal American citizenship and help to define and implement our core, indispensable national interests, which include Middle East peace based on the creation of a Palestinian state.

## **- The Basics about ATFP**

### [Q: What is ATFP?](#)

A: The [American Task Force on Palestine](#) (ATFP) is a 501©(3) non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington, DC. Established in 2003, it is an American NGO and educational organization. Its [Board of Directors](#) is made up of Palestinian Americans, and it has a diverse [staff](#).

### [Q: What is ATFP's mission?](#)

A: ATFP's [mission](#) is to articulate, and educate about, the United States' national interest in helping to create a Palestinian state living alongside Israel in peace, security and dignity. ATFP is committed to strengthening Palestinian-US relations at every level. The Task Force supports Palestinian institution-building, good governance, anti-corruption measures, economic development, and improved living standards. ATFP holds that these same values are relevant to the broader Arab world, and that the question of Palestine is inextricably linked to regional realities and developments.

[Q: Who does ATFP speak for, or represent?](#)

A: ATFP speaks only for itself, its [Board of Directors](#) and those who willingly associate with it. It reflects the views of many Palestinians who are in favor of a two-state solution and many Palestinian-Americans in favor of engaging the American political system to advance this mission. It is not a membership or grassroots group, does not speak and does not claim to speak on behalf of, or represent, the Palestinian people, the Palestinian-American community, or anyone other than itself. ATFP also does not represent the United States government, or the [Palestinian Authority](#) or the [Palestine Liberation Organization](#).

[Q: Who is on ATFP's Board?](#)

A: ATFP's Board of Directors is made up of Palestinian Americans who agree with these principles. The existing Board, in accordance with ATFP's bylaws, approves new members of the Board. To see the current Board makeup click [here](#).

[Q: How is ATFP funded?](#)

A: ATFP is a 501(c) (3), [non-profit](#), non-partisan organization. It is funded by its Board of Directors, online donations, fundraising letters and support for its annual gala. Many embassies, businesses, foundations and individuals support ATFP's mission by sponsoring, underwriting or buying tables or tickets at its annual galas. ATFP gladly welcomes any [contribution](#) made within the law that is offered to support us, providing there are no strings attached. ATFP has never and will not accept any contribution or support, of whatever kind, that compromises its mission or the independence of its decision-making. ATFP urges all those supportive of peace and the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, the world over, to [donate](#) to and support the organization in its pursuit of this goal.

In addition to meeting its fundamental legal obligations regarding financial disclosure, in the interest of greater transparency ATFP has chosen, since its inception, to post [signed and audited financial reports online](#), as soon as they become available for each fiscal year.

[Q: Is ATFP funded by the United States government in any way?](#)

A: The only support ATFP has ever received from the United States government was a one-time grant for a small conference that was held overseas in 2010. The Task Force welcomes all lawful [support](#) to help it pursue its [mission](#) and programs from our government and all quarters, as long as there are no strings attached and there is no compromise to the independence of ATFP's decision-making process.

### Q: Is ATFP a "lobby group?"

A: No. ATFP is a 501(c)(3) American educational, [not-for-profit](#), nonpartisan organization. It does not engage in "lobbying," and it has never had any registered lobbyists on its payroll. ATFP is an educational and advocacy organization, not a "lobbying" group. These categories are frequently conflated outside of Washington, but legally and within the American political system there is a clear distinction between the two. Legally and politically, ATFP is in no sense a "lobby group."

### Q: What does ATFP stand for?

A: ATFP's fundamental [mission](#) is to advocate that a conflict-ending solution that allows two states, Israel and Palestine, to live side-by-side in peace, security and dignity is in the American national interest. ATFP emphasizes its role as an American organization serving American interests first and foremost. ATFP sees those interests as directly and indispensably served by the creation of a Palestinian state in the territories occupied in 1967. It believes such an arrangement is the only potential conflict-ending solution and supports negotiations to achieve it. ATFP also seeks to bring Americans and Palestinians closer together at every level, and to mainstream Palestine, Palestinians, Palestinian Americans in the American policy and broader national conversations.

ATFP also stands for the continuous [improvement of the Palestinian](#) quality of life despite the [political and diplomatic variables](#). ATFP strongly supports Palestinian economic development, institutional-building and reforms aimed at good governance, accountability, transparency and the rule of law. ATFP supports the creation of a state of Palestine that is democratic, pluralistic, tolerant and peaceful. ATFP [believes](#) that resolving the Palestinian issue is inextricably linked with [developments in the Arab world](#) and the broader Middle East. It also holds that [American interests and values](#) are complementary rather than contradictory in the Middle East, and especially with regard to Palestine.

ATFP's approach is characterized by a combination of "principles and pragmatism" (which was the title of the first collection of ATFP publications, speeches and essays issued in [book](#) form and online by the group in 2007). ATFP is not a community, ethnic or grassroots organization. It is a policy organization dedicated to help achieving a set of policy goals. However, ATFP participates in not only the broader American, but also the specifically Arab-American, political and social conversations. ATFP stands strongly for building the widest, most far-reaching coalitions possible in favor of achieving an end to the occupation and the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. It also stands for civility and pluralism, and recognizes that there are many different points of view and approaches within the Palestinian-American and Arab-American communities. ATFP believes that conversations should be carried out with mutual respect and the ability to agree to disagree.

## - ATFP's Positions and Activities

### [Q: How does ATFP advocate for Palestine in Washington?](#)

A: ATFP's fundamental approach to advocacy for Palestine in Washington is to engage the American system as it actually functions and to center its advocacy on the vital American national interest in the creation of a Palestinian state to live in peace, security and dignity alongside Israel. ATFP is not a lobbying organization, and is strictly nonpartisan. It does not engage with elections or party politics. Instead, the Task Force seeks to work with whomever the American people elect to the executive and legislative branches of government and their policy appointees. This is partly because of ATFP's status as a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) educational and advocacy organization. But it is also because the American national interest in a two-state solution that ends both the occupation and the conflict does not change between election cycles. ATFP is driven by its [mission](#) to advocate and promote awareness of the vital American national interest in achieving this all-important policy goal. Another of ATFP's core functions is to work continuously to mainstream Palestine, Palestinians and Palestinian Americans in Washington and throughout American social, cultural and political life.

Because ATFP is a policy, educational and advocacy group, much of its most important work is done discreetly and behind-the-scenes. Typically, when we have had an impact on policy making or framing, we cannot make any such accomplishments public. To do so would be the surest means to limiting future access and influence. This work involves low-key, high-impact engagement with officials, other experts, leading journalists and others who make and shape American policy. However, the cumulative impact of these necessarily discrete labors can be clearly seen in the attendance of a virtual "Who's Who" of the Washington policy community and diplomatic corps involved in matters related to Palestine at our [annual galas](#), the caliber of our keynote speakers, the extraordinarily distinguished honorary host committees for the galas, and the testimonials listed elsewhere in this set of answers to FAQs.

A large part of ATFP's work involves public activity. The organization [hosts](#) and [cohosts](#) numerous significant [events](#) in Washington, and its staff participates as speakers in the highest level [international forums](#), academic institutions, think tank and research organizations, and other conferences, seminars and public events. ATFP staff are also heavily engaged with the [media](#), frequently writing [commentaries](#) and [longer essays](#) for major publications, and serving as a source for major journalists. Indeed, ATFP has moved beyond simply serving as a source for information and opinions into a position in which it frequently helps shape the core conceptualizations of major articles before they are written. [ATFP staff](#) are also frequent [guests](#) on major [American](#), [Arab](#) and [international](#) broadcast programs and engage in robust public advocacy and debate in multiple media and various forums.

Another core aspect of ATFP's advocacy for Palestine is its coalition-building efforts. ATFP strongly believes that a major national, and indeed international, constituency for peace based on the creation of a Palestinian state will be required to achieve this

essential goal. Therefore ATFP is consistently attempting to reach out to the widest range of potential constituent organizations and individuals to try to build such a coalition and working partnerships. The Task Force not only seeks to build relationships with [other advocacy groups](#), [think tanks](#) and [academic institutions](#), but also with [Arab-American](#), [Muslim](#), [Christian](#), peace-activist and, crucially, a wide spectrum of [Jewish-American organizations](#). ATFP believes that all those who support the realization of a two-state solution should put all other or past differences aside and work together to achieve this essential goal. Reaching out to the broadest possible range of potential allies in the quest for peace is a key aspect of how ATFP pursues its mission.

ATFP has also sought to pursue this by building strong working relations with other governments and officials outside of the United States, in particular in the Palestinian leadership, the rest of the Arab world, Israel and Europe. This process is also involved building ties to former, and potentially future, officials and those who helped shape the policy conversation and framing process in those societies.

[Q: If ATFP cannot get into the details of much of its impact on policy, what accomplishments can the organization point to?](#)

A: In addition to its daily policy work, ATFP has played a major role at all stages of its existence in advocating and helping to secure both public and private American aid to the Palestinian people, and [American investment](#) and [charitable donations](#) to Palestinian causes. ATFP on several occasions played a significant role in insuring that American aid to the Palestinian Authority, most of which is used to meet Palestinian public employee payroll for the largest employer in the occupied territories, was either continued or increased.

When the PA announced its state and institution-building program, [ATFP took the leading role](#) in Washington in successfully advocating that the program be viewed not as a development or economic project but as a [political and strategic intervention](#) designed to help end the occupation and create a state of Palestine alongside Israel. ATFP was the [key voice](#) in [reshaping the initial perception](#) of the program in Washington and ensuring that, for several years, the program and the PA budget were appropriately funded. That funding hit a peak of [just under \\$1 billion](#) in 2010. This is an example of the kind of low-key, high-impact work ATFP specializes in, that typically must be pursued with discretion.

ATFP has built solid working relations with a huge range of relevant players on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, and above all with the executive branch of the United States government. True to its non-partisan status, ATFP built strong relations with the Republican White House of former President George W. Bush. ATFP has subsequently maintained these strong relationships with the executive branch and the White House during both terms of our current Democratic President, Barack Obama. During the first decade of ATFP's existence, there have been both Republican and Democratic administrations, both of which have recognized the important value-addition ATFP has provided to the Washington policy conversation. Secretaries of

State [Rice](#) and [Clinton](#) represented these administrations as keynote speakers at ATFP galas.

In addition to its consistent and focused interactions with Congress, staffers and other key Hill entities -- and as a direct and tangible consequence of those carefully-crafted strategic relations -- ATFP has also provided important congressional testimony on numerous occasions. In 2003, ATFP President Ziad Asali testified at a Senate committee hearing on [Palestinian education](#). In 2009, he testified at a hearing of the full U.S. House Committee on International Relations on the topic of "[The Way Forward in the Middle East Peace Process](#)." Later in 2009, he testified at a Senate committee hearing on the [Israeli offensive in Gaza](#).

In December 2007, Dr. Asali was [designated](#) by then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to be one of the four co-chairs of the US-Palestinian Public-Private Partnership (UPP), which sought to build the private sector and civil society in Palestine by [attracting investment](#). The partnership focused on giving medium-sized loans to businesses in the Palestinian territories and providing loans and other funding to Palestinian small businesses. The project attracted [financial and technology help](#) from major corporations such as Intel, Cisco, Google, Microsoft, and other companies, and generated significant [investments](#) in Palestinian businesses.

Dr. Asali served on the US Presidential Delegations to both of the [Palestine Investment Conferences](#) in Bethlehem [in 2008](#) and [2010](#). He played a major role in facilitated both events, and engaged the necessary contacts for the UPP with both Palestinians and Israelis to coordinate the conferences. One major subject of the [first Conference](#) was the planned city of Rawabi, which is now nearing completion. The second focused on, and generated a great deal of support for, small and medium-sized Palestinian businesses. At least [\\$650 million](#) was slated at the conference in support for such Palestinian businesses.

Dr. Asali served as a member of the official United States delegation to the funeral of the [late President Yasser Arafat](#) and as a member of the United States official delegation to observe the Palestinian [presidential elections](#) in January 2005. He also was a delegate with the [National Democratic Institute](#) to monitor the Palestinian legislative election in January 2006.

ATFP was deeply involved in the [first definitive, scientific study](#) of Israeli and Palestinian schoolbooks, which was coordinated by the group "[A Different Future](#)" and headed by Yale University Professor Bruce Wexler. Dr. Asali served on the board of "A Different Future" during the three-year process of researching and preparing the study, which was funded by the State Department. This research, which was the work of a team of Palestinian and Israeli specialists, debunked many common myths about textbooks, while highlighting significant and mutual problems in the curricula it examined. In February 2013, ATFP hosted a [briefing](#) presenting the findings of study at the [National Press Club](#) in Washington, DC.

ATFP has hosted numerous other relevant [conferences](#), [briefings](#) and [public events](#) highlighting Palestinian issues and the urgent need to end the occupation and establish a Palestinian state.

ATFP staff and board members -- including Executive Director [Ghaith Al-Omari](#) and Senior Fellow [Hussein Ibish](#) -- have published scores of [articles](#) in [major publications](#), [longer studies](#) and several [books](#) arguing strongly in favor of ending the occupation and creating a state of Palestine. ATFP staff have also argued this case at [UN conferences](#), other major [international events](#), [colleges](#) and [universities](#) around the country and the world, at meetings of major Christian, Muslim and Jewish American groups covering a wide spectrum, and in countless [major](#) media appearances. ATFP has also moved beyond simply serving as a source for major media stories, to one in which it helps shape the background and framing of these stories. The Task Force is widely considered an indispensable resource by the most relevant [media organizations](#) and [news outlets](#) that cover Palestine-related issues.

In 2010, ATFP issued a groundbreaking and unprecedented [joint public statement](#) endorsing negotiations aimed at securing a two-state solution with the [Jewish Council for Public Affairs](#), an umbrella group supported by 15 national and 145 local Jewish American groups.

ATFP established and maintains a [joint internship program](#) with [Americans for Peace Now](#) (APN), in which ATFP hosts an Israeli intern and [APN](#) hosts a Palestinian intern each summer.

At many different stages in its history, ATFP has been involved in [securing travel permission](#) for Palestinian Fulbright scholars and other students, and raised the issue of Israel's denial of entry to Palestinian-Americans with the State Department.

In addition to such activities, of which the above is only a small set of examples, ATFP has been deeply involved in providing direct humanitarian support to the Palestinian people.

Even though it did not have any experience or infrastructure for charitable work at that time, during the financial and aid crisis of 2006, ATFP established a Palestine Humanitarian Fund to address the most immediate and dire needs of the Palestinian people. Thanks to the generous donations of countless individuals, ATFP was able to directly disburse a total amount of [\\$40,000](#) to two Palestinian hospitals, Al-Makassed in Jerusalem, and St. Luke's in Nablus, to purchase urgently needed medical equipment. \$5,000 also went to the United Palestinian Appeal for the purchase of medical supplies for Palestinian refugees in Gaza. In 2006, ATFP also transferred [\\$10,000](#) to the Palestine Red Crescent Hospital in Jerusalem.

In 2007, ATFP, through the [Palestine Humanitarian Fund](#), donated \$100,000 to Dar El-Tifl (Home of Children) in Jerusalem, a Palestinian charity established in 1948 to care for orphaned Palestinian children.

In 2008, ATFP and its sister organization, American Charities for Palestine (ACP), took the lead in extending the one-laptop-per-child program to Palestine, which delivered a thousand laptop computers, worth \$200,000, to Palestinian schools in the [Occupied Territories](#).

Along with several partners, ATFP initiated and completed over several years a \$400,000 [development project](#) in the West Bank village of Beit Ur al-Tahta. In cooperation with CHF International, and with funding from the Sheikh Mohammed Shami Foundation (which contributed \$150,000 of the funds) and USAID, the project installed street lights and other infrastructure development in the village. Also in 2009, ACP made a \$5,000 donation to the [Spafford Children's Center](#) in Jerusalem.

In 2011, ACP facilitated a donation of \$10,000 to [The Four Homes of Mercy](#) in Jerusalem to provide permanent residency and clinical care in the occupied Palestinian territories to 78 patients, including 25 children and 53 adult men and women. In the same year, ACP coordinated with Craig Newmark, of Craigslist and CraigConnect, as well as the Aspen Institute, to deliver \$50,000 to build networks and capacities among [Palestinian youth](#) using new technologies. This effort was conducted in partnership with a local organization in the West Bank, Palestine Vision, to support a specific project called the Mediterranean Youth Technology Club (MYTecC) as part of ACP's broader effort to improve the education sector of the West Bank.

In 2011 ACP raised \$27,000 to provide essential [preventive and curative eye care](#) to Jerusalem's St. John's Eye Hospital's most vulnerable patients. In 2012 ACP raised [another \\$10,000](#) for the Hospital.

During its period of existence, ACP helped secure close to \$1 million in development aid for Palestine in the health and education sectors. In 2008, ACP established the [first memorandum](#) of understanding (MOU) entered into by USAID with any NGO. Under the terms of the arrangement, ACP would select the projects and the designated recipients, and work with USAID to [insure donor confidence](#). This MOU was the work of years of labor, as well being as unprecedented and groundbreaking.

#### [Q: What is the purpose of the annual ATFP Gala?](#)

A: Both ATFP and a resounding consensus of policymakers, officials, diplomats, analysts and other prominent Washingtonians strongly believe that the annual ATFP Gala has had a [profound impact](#) on reshaping and redefining the image of Palestine and the Palestinians, and especially Palestinian Americans, in our nation's capital. Each and every gala has been centered on recognizing, through awards, the achievements of prominent and successful Palestinian Americans and their contributions to our country and our world. These outstanding Palestinian Americans have made important contributions in diverse fields such as national service in the government and the military, literature, the performing arts, scientific and technological innovation, entrepreneurship and business development, scholarship, philanthropy, and medicine. The existence of such accomplished Palestinian Americans has been largely unknown

outside of the community, with a tiny number of exceptions. Highlighting their accomplishments and honoring their achievements is one way in which the galas serve to help mainstream Palestine, Palestinians and Palestinian Americans in Washington and beyond.

One of the purposes of the Gala is to change this, and highlight the all-American success story of numerous Palestinian Americans from all walks of life and every possible field and discipline. The Gala consciously seeks to move beyond the traditional binary stereotypes of Palestinians in the American imagination as either menacing terrorists or wretched refugees, and demonstrate that Palestinian Americans are an integral part of American society and culture. It is also to present the community with successful Palestinian Americans who can serve as role models for young people and future generations.

Moreover, the ATFP Gala has been a [unique annual meeting place](#) for all of those involved in Middle East policy work in Washington, some of whom would never otherwise be in the same room, applauding the same things at the same times, and standing at attention in silence for both the American and Palestinian national anthems. Bringing all of these dignitaries, together with community members, under the banner of, and to celebrate, Palestine, is a unique achievement in and of itself. Even those otherwise skeptical of ATFP's policies, from many different perspectives, agree that the Gala is a unique and invaluable institution in Washington that serves all of these purposes. One Washington insider noted, the ATFP Gala has become an indispensable "place to see and be seen."

Finally, the stature and comprehensiveness of the attendees at the galas confirms ATFP's deep engagement with all levels of Middle East policymaking, as do the high-level of its keynote speakers which have included secretaries of state [Condoleezza Rice](#) and [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#), National Security Advisor [James Jones](#), Palestinian Prime Minister [Salam Fayyad](#), Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs [R. Nicholas Burns](#), and White House Middle East Coordinator [Philip Gordon](#). The consistently lengthy, impressive and highly distinguished list of gala honorary host committee members, year after year, further demonstrates the credibility and stature ATFP has earned in policy-making and policy framing circles, the diplomatic corps, and among distinguished Arab and Palestinian Americans. (Link)

So, while the gala itself is far from merely symbolic, it also demonstrates through its attendees and speakers, the degree of engagement and integration ATFP has been able to secure in the Washington policy conversation on Palestine and the Middle East. It is the ultimate example of how to bring a Palestinian viewpoint to the Washington conversation, and to mainstream Palestine, Palestinians and Palestinian Americans in it. This annual evening reflects ATFP's low-key, high-impact policy work throughout the entire year. As a very senior American official once wrote to us, "The lights in Washington shine on Palestine this night."

[Q: What is ATFP's vision for the future for Palestine?](#)

A: In 2006, ATFP published in the *New York Times* a [vision](#) of the Palestinian state it advocates: democratic, pluralistic, tolerant and peaceful. Obviously the nature of Palestinian society and a Palestinian state will be up to the Palestinian people. This is not for ATFP to dictate. Yet the organization believes that it has a serious contribution to make to the Palestinian and Palestinian-American debate about what sort of state and society Palestinians are struggling to create.

Moreover, ATFP believes that the same values now apply more broadly in the rest of the Arab world in the context of the so-called "Arab Spring." Indeed, ATFP has noted on several previous occasions that some of the PA institution-building and reform measures initiated in 2010 anticipated and predated many of the demands for greater accountability, transparency and good governance that have been a hallmark of uprisings against dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and elsewhere. ATFP believes that the Palestinian struggle for freedom is now more deeply conjoined to regional developments than ever before and that the two are inextricably intertwined.

ATFP's vision for Palestine, as articulated in 2006, is now relevant to the broader Arab world, as developments in the Middle East will be essential in laying the groundwork for achieving Palestinian independence. Recently ATFP expanded its mission with the approval of its Board of Directors to reflect these new realities. It now recognizes the centrality of regional developments to promoting the cause of Palestinian independence, and advocates that American values of democracy, pluralism, accountability, transparency and the rule of law, be seen as complementary and not contradictory throughout the region and especially with regard to [Palestine](#).

#### [Q: What is ATFP's position on violence?](#)

A: ATFP categorically and unequivocally condemns all violence against civilians, no matter the cause and who the victims or perpetrators may be. ATFP is in favor of resolving the conflict exclusively through peaceful means, particularly direct negotiations.

#### [Q: What is ATFP's position regarding Jerusalem?](#)

A: ATFP believes that a peace agreement will only be possible with the capital of the Palestinian state being in East Jerusalem. There are many ways in which such an agreement can be negotiated and implemented in practice. ATFP strongly believes that the Palestinian capital must be in East Jerusalem, including because of the interests of the other Arab and Muslim countries. ATFP is not a negotiator or a party to the negotiations. ATFP will support any diplomatic agreement with Israel by the PLO, with the approval of the Palestinian people.

#### [Q: What is ATFP's position on refugee issues?](#)

A: ATFP recognizes that the right of return and all other refugee issues are among the agreed-upon final status issues to be determined between the parties in direct

negotiations. There are many ways in which this issue can be resolved through negotiations depending on the agreement of the national representatives of the two peoples with the support of the public. Many of those involved in Palestinian and pro-Palestinian public issues find themselves accused by those who want to discredit them of having "given up" or "surrendered" the right of return for refugees. ATFP has no standing to "give up" the right of return, nor does it seek to do so, as is sometimes alleged by malevolent detractors. ATFP is not a negotiator or a party to the negotiations. ATFP will support any diplomatic agreement with Israel by the PLO, with the approval of the Palestinian people.

[Q: What is ATFP's position on "BDS?"](#)

A: ATFP is unequivocally committed to a two-state solution, and is opposed to the occupation but not to Israel. Therefore, ATFP supports boycotting settlement goods, products and investments. Because settlement activities violate international law and are illegitimate, the economic proceeds of this project, or funding it, also cannot be considered legitimate. Moreover, [settlements](#) diminish the prospects for a Palestinian state and for peace. However ATFP does not support boycotts of Israel in general, because we support a two-state solution, and believe that such boycotts conflate Israel itself with the illegitimate settlements. ATFP believes such a conflation is likely to [encourage mainstream Israeli society](#) to identify or feel more solidarity with the settler movement, thereby weakening the constituency for a two-state solution.

ATFP [believes](#) that the approach to this issue that is being developed by the European Union and some key individual European governments, as an alternative to the "BDS movement," is the most effective and rational response to Israel's ongoing illegitimate settlement activities. They are increasingly taking the approach that while they enjoy strong multilateral and bilateral relations with the State of Israel in its internationally recognized borders, they will not fund, finance, or cooperate in any way with the occupation and the settlement project. ATFP believes that this approach is firmly rooted in international law and the international consensus, and that it will help to promote a two-state peace agreement between Israel and Palestine.

[Q: What is ATFP's position on the "one-state solution?"](#)

A: ATFP [believes](#) there is only one potential conflict-ending solution: two states, Palestine and Israel, living alongside each other in peace, security and dignity. The two-state solution is enshrined in international law and countless UN Security Council resolutions, is the policy of virtually every government in the world, has been accepted unanimously by the Arab League through the [Arab Peace Initiative](#), and constitutes a local, regional and international consensus. This overwhelming international consensus, based on international law and legitimacy, should be considered the greatest achievement of the Palestinian national movement and asset for the Palestinian people in their quest for freedom. This was reflected by the [1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence](#) adopted in Algiers, which embraced the two-state solution as the Palestinian national goal.

Moreover, ATFP [does not believe](#) that a one-state agenda is achievable. It also does not believe that any other identifiable, attainable outcome apart from a two-state solution will result in an [end to the conflict or the occupation](#). ATFP is therefore committed to advocating on behalf of a two-state solution as the only plausible means to resolve the conflict and gain Palestinians first-class citizenship in a state of their own.

However, we understand that some Palestinians and their allies are in favor of seeking a single state for all Israelis and Palestinians. While we respect the right of anyone to hold such an opinion, ATFP notes that the majority of both Israelis and Palestinians have made their preference for a two-state solution clear in virtually every [poll](#) and survey in the past two decades at least, and that a [single state is not achievable](#) and would not end the conflict. ATFP is whole-heartedly committed to a two-state solution, while remaining open to a healthy, respectful dialogue with one-state agenda advocates.

## **- ATFP and the Palestinian-American community**

[Q: Has ATFP done enough to communicate directly with the Palestinian-American and Arab-American communities?](#)

A: It's true that given its limited resources and [highly specific mission](#), during its first decade ATFP focused its targeted messaging mainly on Washington policy and decision-making constituencies rather than the Palestinian- and Arab-American communities. ATFP was based on a new idea, and a break from the grassroots model that had dominated Arab and Palestinian American activism for decades. Because it sought, above all, to have an impact on US policy, it consciously and deliberately identified its target audience as the Washington policy-making and policy-framing establishment, and focused and targeted its messaging towards this constituency.

The policy was adopted mainly because of the limited resources of the organization, both at the time of its founding, and until this day. ATFP chose, with some regret, as a matter of policy, to focus its communications and its attentions generally on the Washington policy establishment. However, ATFP believes that, given the success of its approach during its first decade -- which has exceeded all initial expectations -- it is now in a position to begin to place more emphasis on outreach and explaining its policies and approach to the community at length, replying to reasonable criticisms and correcting misinformation, engaging in healthy dialogue with those who disagree with us and trying to demonstrate what, precisely, our approach has been able to accomplish.

ATFP does not claim to have identified the only valid or effective model for engagement, nor has it been the first Arab-American organization to achieve policy results. But it does believe that it has been able to demonstrate that the system is open to Palestinian and Arab Americans, even on the issue of Palestine, and that it has employed a model

that is effective and which can and should be replicated on many different issues and through multiple, varying organizations.

ATFP believes in a diversity of approaches, and argues that its own strategy for pursuing goals such as ending the occupation have proven strikingly effective where a number of others, especially traditional models, have notably failed to create any policy impact. What ATFP basically encourages is following the time-proven model of all successful communities that have staked their claim in the American decision-making processes: serious, sustained and purposive engagement with the system rather than merely condemning it.

In the coming months and years, ATFP intends to become more proactive in explaining its approach to the broader community. Palestinian and Arab Americans can only empower themselves as other Americans have in the past -- by [claiming their full rights as citizens](#) and becoming deeply involved in the political process and conversation at every level as patriotic Americans who put our own national interest above all.

[Q: How does ATFP respond to criticism from within the Palestinian-American and Palestinian communities?](#)

A: ATFP speaks only on behalf of itself, and its [Board of Directors](#). ATFP believes that Palestinian Americans can learn from the experiences of all other American interest groups, ethnic and otherwise, and how, precisely, a group can empower themselves in the American political system and in Washington. But ATFP does not ask the community or other organizations to endorse its approach, and it does not condemn others for pursuing a different course. ATFP supports diversity of opinion and freedom of speech and, while it calls for civility, it also encourages diversity.

Disagreement is healthy. Even robust and intense debate is healthy. But debate must be carried out with civility, [mutual respect and a willingness to agree to disagree](#). ATFP believes that much of the criticism aimed at it is the result of a lack of understanding of what the Task Force does and why. After all, much of what ATFP has done has been innovative and hence controversial. It is also partly a result of ATFP's lack of outreach to the community during its first decade because, given its limited resources, it decided to focus on its primary mission and target audience in the Washington policy community. A core purpose of this set of answers to FAQs is to help clarify these misunderstandings and promote a more informed conversation.

[Q: What does ATFP advocate Palestinian Americans do?](#)

A: ATFP believes the Palestinian-American community is best served by engaging in American society at every possible level: cultural, political, educational, institutional and simply in terms of day-to-day life, as proud and patriotic Palestinian Americans. One of ATFP's core goals is to help mainstream Palestine, Palestinians and Palestinian Americans in American policy, culture, politics and daily life. We believe that [countless Palestinian Americans](#) across the country are doing this, by excelling in their own fields,

professions and endeavors, every day. ATFP strongly encourages this, and hopes to be able to provide one platform for honoring and recognizing those achievements and ensuring that our fellow Americans are aware of this under-recognized reality of Palestinian-American achievement.

Palestinian Americans can embrace what the United States offers them. Most importantly this starts with full, unrestricted citizenship, and open access to the political system and all the traditional levers of power and influence, insofar as the community is willing and able to mobilize and deploy them. Citizenship in the only global superpower makes their voices uniquely important, should they choose to employ it in a coordinated, systematic and strategic manner. In their advocacy for Palestine, the Palestinian Americans have another crucial tool: the official commitment of the US government under successive Republican and Democratic administrations to ending the occupation and creating a Palestinian state.

Palestinian Americans are excelling in every field, in every facet of American life, with multiple perspectives and myriad approaches – some of them complementary, others in competition – but all of which reflect a dynamic community empowering itself. ATFP believes in diversity, pluralism, tolerance and dialogue in Palestine, among Palestinian Americans and in the broader American society in which we participate. We welcome different points of view as long as they are expressed with civility and mutual respect.

ATFP is one vehicle through which Palestinians can promote their cause, work together to empower their community, and strengthen their voices. We are proud to accept the support of all those who agree with our mission and model. But we are well aware that there are other options and models that people may wish to pursue and we encourage everyone to advance their agendas as they see fit.

ATFP offers a vision for both Palestine and Palestinian Americans that is a positive one. We are for Palestine. We are categorically against the occupation that began in 1967, but we are not against the State of Israel. The occupation is unjust. Ending it is a vital American national interest and necessary to create a Palestinian state. We are for improving the Palestinian quality of life in all sectors. We are for bringing Palestinians and Americans closer together at every level. We are for Palestinian and Arab Americans achieving as much as they can in our own society, in every discipline and career path, as possible. Ours is a vision of hope. It is a vision of [success](#). It is a vision of liberation, of realization of dreams, of independence, and of the empowerment for Palestinians and Arab Americans both in the Middle East, and here, at home, in the United States.

**- ATFP and the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian Authority**

[Q: Is ATFP an adjunct or advocacy group for the PA or the PLO in Washington?](#)

No. ATFP is an American organization that jealously guards the independence of its decision-making. ATFP shares with the PA and the PLO the quest for two states, but it speaks solely for itself and its [Board of Directors](#). ATFP makes its own assessments based on its mission and analyses. This independence is crucial to ATFP's reputation for integrity in Washington. We have paid a significant cost for upholding this independence. The idea that ATFP functions as an adjunct of the PA or the PLO is as fallacious as the notion that it does so for the State Department or anyone else.

[Q: What is ATFP's Relationship with the PLO Mission in Washington?](#)

A: ATFP is an independent, American organization that never had any formal ties to the PLO or the PLO Mission to the USA.

[Q: Did ATFP oppose the PLO UN initiatives?](#)

A: There were two major recent PLO UN initiatives.

The first, in [2011](#), was a PLO request to the Security Council for full UN membership, which failed. The [ATFP Board of Directors](#) debated the matter on three occasions and then voted 13-6 in favor of taking no position on the initiative. The organization and its staff never opposed, nor did it support, this initiative.

The second PLO UN initiative was in 2012 for upgraded status as a nonmember observer state in the UN General Assembly, which succeeded. It was based on an overwhelming international consensus, and the issue was never raised within ATFP. The [Task Force worked](#) to [mitigate the aid cuts](#) that followed the 2012 [UN initiative](#).

**- ATFP and Israel**

[Q: Why does ATFP speak with Jews, Israelis and Zionists?](#)

A: From its outset, ATFP has understood that, in order to pursue its mission, building dialogue and, wherever possible, constructive working relationships with crucial players on all sides is essential. ATFP, from its outset, has been clear that while it categorically opposes the occupation that began in 1967, it does not oppose the State of Israel. Based on this fundamental premise, from its founding, the Task Force has publicly and openly stated that it meets and deals with all relevant players -- including Israelis, Israeli officials, and their Jewish-American supporters -- in order to advance its mission. ATFP engages openly with Israel and Israeli officials, for the express, clear and unapologetic purpose of pursuing its policy goals in an effective, open and transparent manner.

From its earliest days, ATFP understood that in order to achieve its aim of ending the occupation and creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel, it had to attempt to build the widest possible coalition. This includes not only Arab-American organizations, but

also other interested groups including Christian, foreign policy, and international relations oriented organizations, and, especially, mainstream Jewish-American institutions and individuals.

ATFP has, for years, been openly calling for the widest possible coalition in favor of a two-state solution. The two populations in the United States most invested in the Israeli-Palestinian issue are Arab Americans and Jewish Americans. ATFP has argued that, albeit for different reasons and based on different narratives and affiliations, Arab Americans on behalf of Palestine and Jewish Americans on behalf of Israel both have a pressing interest in a two-state solution. ATFP has further argued that, because they either already share, or should share, this common goal, Arab and Jewish American groups should lead an even broader coalition in support of ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state to live alongside Israel in peace, security and dignity. This has meant seeking dialogue and points of convergence with Jewish-American groups across the mainstream political spectrum.

ATFP has also understood from its inception that dialogue with Israelis, including Israeli officials, is essential for working to help achieve not only a two-state solution but also positive, tangible and measurable improvements in the daily lives of Palestinians on the ground. As noted in the "accomplishments" section of this FAQ, although it is not a charitable or development organization but a policy advocacy group, ATFP has been involved in considerable efforts to help Palestinians develop their society and provide much-needed public and private aid.

All of this work, as well as much of its policy advocacy efforts, necessarily involve building working relations with Israeli government officials, as well as those in the Palestinian Authority, Arab states and here at home in the United States. Early in the organization's history, a 10-member ATFP delegation embarked on an eight-day tour of the Middle East from December 8-16, 2006. This visit involved substantive meetings with top political leaders including Jordan's King Abdullah II, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and Israel's Foreign Minister and Acting Prime Minister Tzipi Livni. The Palestinian-American board members of ATFP held candid and thorough discussions with these and other high-ranking government officials in the region. This early, high-level outreach set the stage for the development of even deeper and more sustained engagement as the organization developed and grew.

#### [Q: Does ATFP support "normalization" with Israel?](#)

A: ATFP is an American organization. It categorically opposes the occupation that began in 1967, but it does not oppose the State of Israel. The *raison d'être* of ATFP is to end the occupation and establish a Palestinian state, but not to oppose the existence of the State of Israel. In order to achieve its policy goals, ATFP has built relationships with American, Palestinian, Israeli, Arab and other relevant officials, institutions and individuals. ATFP believes that Palestinian and Arab Americans are free, and indeed obliged if they wish to have an impact, to engage with all key constituents and stakeholders, including Israel and its Jewish-American supporters. This freedom, and

the opportunity to impact decision-making in the world's sole superpower by virtue of our American citizenship, is one of the greatest assets of the Palestinian-American and Arab-American communities. It must be utilized to the fullest extent and not ignored, squandered or disparaged.

[ATFP encourages](#) all people, including Palestinians in the occupied territories, in Israel, and all over the world, to engage all others, including with Jews and Israelis, to look for cooperation, partnership and points of convergence wherever they can be found. [ATFP supports building people-to-people](#), grassroots, institutional and other avenues of engagement involving individuals, civil society, commercial interests and others that can advance the cause of cooperation and reconciliation and move us quickly towards resolving the conflict, ending the occupation and creating an independent state of Palestine alongside Israel.

The normalization of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Arab states or other countries is [a matter for governments and a subject of diplomacy](#). ATFP is not a government, and is not affiliated with any government. ATFP recognizes that diplomatic and political normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab states in general will be the consequence of a two-state peace agreement with the Palestinians, as envisaged in the Arab Peace Initiative. The timing and manner of such normalization, however, is a matter for governments and negotiations, not policy advocacy groups like ATFP. However, ATFP looks forward to a Middle Eastern future in which all the peoples of the region live in a condition of normalcy, especially the Palestinian people in their own, independent, democratic and pluralistic state.

[Q: Do ATFP staff attend Israeli embassy functions?](#)

A: Yes. ATFP staff attend functions held by dozens of embassies in Washington, including those of Israel. ATFP is an American organization doing policy work in Washington. Attending events, including embassy functions, is essential to this work. Since ATFP is opposed to the occupation but not Israel, [ATFP deals with the Israeli Embassy in Washington](#), and other Israeli officials, in an open, professional, and unapologetic manner. This is a function of ATFP's strategy that holds such relations are required to achieve a two-state solution and build a critical mass among all the major players in favor of peace.

## **- Misperceptions about ATFP**

[Q: ATFP is controversial and there seem to be misperceptions and false claims about it. What have informed people said about the Task Force?](#)

A: Many distinguished officials and noteworthy practitioners have commended the work and approach of ATFP throughout the years. The following is a small sample of such positive statements:

### **President Barack Obama (October 29, 2013)**

"Peace is necessary, peace is just, and peace is possible. The support of the Palestinian and Arab-American communities and of important groups like yours is critical to making it a reality. Congratulations, again, on the 10th anniversary of ATFP." ([Obama's letter of congratulations and support to ATFP](#))

### **White House Middle East Coordinator Phil Gordon (October 29, 2013)**

"ATFP is a remarkable organization. In many ways, this organization is the embodiment of what President Obama said in his historic address in Jerusalem in March: 'You must create the change that you want to see.' Your efforts to develop partnerships with a wide and diverse array of stakeholders are a model for public engagement in a city not always known for civility or reaching out across party lines. One need look no further than the many different organizations represented here tonight to see this approach at work. You are known and respected not just for what you do, but for how you do it.

Your work has also carved out space for a nuanced, informed policy discussion, helping provide the American public with a better understanding of the Palestinian narrative and its importance for the United States. Your work has served to reinforce what the President emphasized during his visit to Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem: that the creation of a Palestinian state living alongside Israel in peace, security, and dignity is not only in the interest of Palestinians and Israelis, it is in the national security interest of the United States.

ATFP has made the case for peace through thick and thin. We need your passionate commitment now more than ever." ([ATFP Gala 2013](#))

### **Former US ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis (October, 2013)**

"If you don't have you Palestinians don't have somebody in Washington who has access, is seen as a moderate voice, a sensible voice for compromise and for a solution that can get access to the policy makers and the Congress, then you are just cutting off your arm to spite your face. ATFP can provide the kind of analysis and arguments to balance a bit the scales in the minds of their interlocutors, and it does so in all sorts of ways -- but most effectively in face to face contexts." ([ATFP Interview](#))

**Wilson Center VP and former senior State Department official Aaron David Miller (October, 2013)**

“What makes ATFP in my judgment probably the most effective organization committed to Palestinian national objectives in Washington and in the United States is its integrity, pragmatism and vision.” ([ATFP Interview](#))

**Former White House Chief of Staff, Gov. John Sununu (October, 2013)**

“When Ziad came to me and said he was going to start an organization which he called the American Task Force on Palestine to represent the Palestinian plight in this city I was thrilled to hear it. ATFP is the most respected voice for the cause of Palestinians in Washington and frankly in America today. They are respected, they are listened to, they are invited to the councils.” ([I Can See Palestine ATFP Video](#))

**President of AMIDEAST, Amb. Theodore Kattouf (October, 2013)**

“This is an American organization that understands the Middle East and it’s given the Palestinian-Americans a seat at the table they never had.” ([ATFP Interview](#))

**Former Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad (October, 2013)**

“I think it’s a really a very important role I salute them for all they do. Palestinians Diaspora have been, and continue to be, a very important element of the overall Palestinian effort.” ([I Can See Palestine ATFP Video](#))

**Hamid Alkifaey, *Al Hayat* (November 13, 2013)**

“Many see ATFP as blazing the trail for the creation of a broad, genuinely effective Arab lobby that could advocate successfully for Arab issues, particularly the Palestinian one, and gather supporters and partners.” ([Al Hayat](#))

**Walid Issa, a young Palestinian activist from the West Bank (October, 2013)**

“We are group of like-minded young professionals in Minnesota, Palestine, and Israel who believe in peace. We have joined forces with ATFP to make it happen.” ([I Can See Palestine ATFP Video](#))

**Palestinian-American Congressional staffer Bassima Alghussein (October, 2013)**

“Yes, we have big dreams and its very helpful to know that they are engaged, organized and committed likeminded people in the Arab-American community that can help us all work together to achieve our hopes for ourselves and our country.” ([I Can See Palestine ATFP Video](#))

**Palestinian-American entrepreneur and philanthropist Talat Othman (October 29, 2013):**

“And to you, Ziad, thank you. Your team and the board exhibited courage, resoluteness and stayed with your mission for a free, independent and prosperous Palestine.” ([ATFP Gala 2013](#))

**Palestinian-American businessman and technological innovator Jesse Aweida (October 29, 2013)**

“You know we talked about this ten years ago, how it would be nice to have an organization here in Washington that really speaks for the Palestinians. And I was there with Ziad and the others at the time. It was a great idea. Time goes fast. That was ten years ago. I just want to add that the American Task Force on Palestine under the leadership of Ziad has really given the Palestinian state and situation credibility all over the place. And it was said before, and its true, it *is* happening and hopefully we can continue to benefit from that.” ([ATFP Gala 2013](#))

**Philanthropist Maria Aweida (October 29, 2013)**

“We are sincerely grateful to have been a part of ATFP for such a long time and we are grateful to the members and particularly to the leadership for its very sane, and thoughtful and practical approach to bringing Palestine into focus for the powers that be.” ([ATFP Gala 2013](#))

**Prof. Saliba Sarsar, Associate Vice President for Global Initiatives at Monmouth University (October 29, 2013)**

“ATFP is a beacon of moderation and wisdom shining light on the path to the two state solution and to peace while defending human dignity, promoting human security and standing up for what is right for Palestine and for American national interests toward Palestine. To Dr. Ziad Asali, Mrs. Naila Asali, the ATFP Board of Directors, Senior Fellow Hussein Ibish and Executive Director Ghaith Al-Omari, and ATFP’s Staff: Happy 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! I am, and we all, are grateful to you for the vision and for energizing the light, you are indeed the unsung heroes. I would not be standing in front of you this evening without the inspiration and support of ATFP and of others.” ([ATFP Gala 2013](#))

**Rep. Justin Amash (October 29, 2013)**

“Thank you to the American Task Force on Palestine. Congratulations on your 10-year Anniversary. I really believe in your mission which is to promote peace in the Middle East and to promote peace in Israel and Palestine.” ([ATFP Gala 2013](#))

**Palestinian-American engineer and activist Faris Ghawi (October, 2013)**

“ATFP provides us young Arabs here in the US with an established and successful organization that we can build on and replicate.” ([I Can See Palestine ATFP Video](#))

**Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton (October 19, 2011)**

"As friends and supporters of ATFP, we recognize that the cause of peace cannot be the work of governments alone. I commend everyone at ATFP, and those of you who support its mission, for your tireless commitment to our shared goal – two states, the State of Palestine and the State of Israel, living side-by-side in peace and security." ([Letter from Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton](#))

**Middle East Special Envoy, Amb. David Hale (October 19, 2011)**

"The American Task Force on Palestine plays a critical role in advancing the cause of peace. As Secretary Clinton emphasized when she spoke here last year, the ATFP’s mission is quintessentially American, and, Ziad, your leadership has made this mission a reality." ([ATFP Sixth Annual Gala](#))

### **Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad (October 19, 2011)**

"I want to start by again reiterating my thanks to you, Ziad and the American Task Force on Palestine, for the work that you do. It is indeed a privilege to take part in this important function, and to support the excellent work that you do in providing a bridge for us Palestinians, the Palestinian Authority, and the Palestinian people to this very important nation, and to this capital in particular. I know a lot of people have spent too much time trying to pigeon-hole the ATFP, and some having problems with it being perceived or seen as a bit right-of-center. Some actually may find it rather frank for me to call it "just a bit right-of-center" when they think it is a lot right-of-center. To me, what is important in this business is not whether you are right-of-center or left-of-center. What is important is in this business for you to be right at least fifty percent of the time, and by that standard ATFP makes it handily. This is a bar that the ATFP as a matter of fact clears with a substantial margin to spare, full of professionalism and integrity, providing the kind of effective bridging operation that we very much need. Particularly, I feel at this time, when our relations with the United States are going through a period of strain, if I may be frank, in characterizing them against the backdrop of the recent activity involving the United Nations, as you know." ([ATFP Sixth Annual Gala](#))

### **Renowned artist and designer Nawaf Soliman (October 19, 2011)**

"I want to sincerely thank the ATFP team for their outstanding efforts to highlight the cause and contributions of Palestinians at large." ([ATFP Sixth Annual Gala](#))

### **An unnamed administration official quoted in *Foreign Policy Magazine* (October, 2011)**

"They've been critical in getting sustained and high levels of support from both Republican and Democratic administrations. They have pretty high access, they can pass messages, they can work quietly with the Hill, they're not media attention seekers, they are trusted and they try to work behind the scenes." ([Foreign Policy](#))

### **Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton (October 20, 2010)**

"Thank you very much, Ziad, for that introduction and for your leadership of this important organization, and for you and the steadfast support that ATFP has given to the cause of peace."

"We meet at a time when we rightly can join together to celebrate the achievements and the mission of the American Task Force on Palestine and the four extraordinary Palestinian Americans that are being honored tonight. A soldier, a poet, a playwright and a builder – each story is unique but together they represent the talent and dynamism of the Palestinian American community and the Palestinian Diaspora around the world. In big cities and small towns across America, Palestinian Americans are contributing to the richness of our culture, the strength of our economy, and the liveliness of our democracy.

The American Task Force on Palestine is also contributing to our country and our tradition of citizens gathering together to express their views and help shape the national debate.

Now, when it comes to the conflict in the Middle East, it is all too easy for positions to harden into dogma, for tempers to flare, for rhetoric to outpace reality. But you have provided a welcome voice of reason and a steady advocacy on behalf of a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

You have helped us see past the false choices of this conflict: Being pro-Palestinian does not mean you must reject Israel's right to exist. (Applause.) And being pro-Israel does not mean you must deny the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. (Applause.) The path to security and dignity for both peoples lies in negotiations that result in two states living side by side in peace and prosperity, and a comprehensive peace in the entire region.

As this organization has emphasized, that outcome is also in the interests of the United States, as well as the people of the region, and even people around the world. But most of all, it is in the interests of both Palestinians and Israelis." ([ATFP Fifth Annual Gala](#))

**Senior American military officer and professor Dr. Peter Mansour (October 20, 2010)**

"What I learned from this experience is that genuine progress in difficult conflicts requires finding willing partners in the quest for peace. When extremists control the agenda, then politics become frozen. And that in a nutshell is the purpose of groups like the American Task Force on Palestine – a moderate voice for Palestinian-Americans and a willing partner in the search for a lasting peace in the Middle East. May God bless the voices of moderation in that endeavor." ([ATFP Fifth Annual Gala](#))

**Award-winning poet Ms. Naomi Shihab Nye (October 20, 2010)**

"Deepest thanks to Naila and Ziad Asali for your gracious consideration and your advocacy for Palestine and peace." ([ATFP Fifth Annual Gala](#))

**Executive VP, Booz Allen Hamilton, Mr. Ghassan Salameh, (October 20, 2010)**

“Six years ago, after 32 years in this country and only after I made Sr. Partner, I finally got the courage to publicly admit that I am Palestinian American. The fear of being labeled of being stereotyped, the fear for my kids, and the fear for my job stopped me from coming out - and for years I was tormented by it. I want to thank Ziad and the work he and many of you are doing to give people like me the courage to be unafraid, to be proud to be Palestinian American, to be able to openly speak about the suffering of Palestinians, and at the same time be a loyal U.S citizen who cares deeply about this great country.” ([ATFP Fifth Annual Gala](#))

**Anne Selden Annab (April 5, 2010)**

“ATFP's website is a treasure trove of up to date, highly relevant information, news and opinion concerning Palestine. They don't use cheap tricks- they use hard work, careful analysis and diplomacy to do what they can to help end the contentious Israel/Palestine conflict...for every one's sake. They are Golden Rule people through and through: By wisely nurturing a totally civilized, reasonable and sustainable conversation they are creating real respect for a real Palestinian state.” ([Anne Selden Annab's Blog](#))

**National Security Advisor Gen. James L. Jones (October 15, 2009)**

"As Ziad mentioned, we first met in 2007 when I was appointed Special Envoy for Middle East Security and we also worked together on the US-Palestinian Partnership. Ziad has been a great friend ever since, and he has served this body as President with distinction. May ask you to join me in recognizing his record of service to this organization and the cause of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Ziad, thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am deeply honored to represent President Obama at the Fourth Annual Gala of the American Task Force on Palestine. For six years, ATFP has been an independent and influential voice in promoting an end to the conflict in the Middle East through a negotiated agreement for two states, Israel and Palestine. ATFP has taken a clear stand against violence, no matter what the cause, and no matter the victims or the perpetrators. It has partnered with USAID and other US agencies, NGOs and think tanks to help improve life in the West Bank and Gaza in very, very concrete and meaningful ways. It has worked to bring the Palestinians closer to fulfilling their legitimate aspirations for statehood, and to unleash the extraordinary potential of the Palestinian people.” ([ATFP Fourth Annual Gala](#))

**Amb. Robert Pelletreau (October 15, 2009)**

"All of us who are supporters of peace... must be actively engaged in speaking out, as the Task Force is speaking out, and continue to speak out and never give up, and never give up, and never give up!" ([ATFP Fourth Annual Gala](#))

**Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (October 15, 2009)**

"It is my sincere pleasure to congratulate you on the achievements and successes that your organization has made during the short period since its establishment. As an American Palestinian organization that promotes the fundamental values and ideals of the American people, you have been instrumental in advocating the just cause of peace and freedom for your Palestinian brethren. The work you are undertaking to support a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on a two-state solution is highly commended and appreciate it." ([Letter from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas](#))

**House Committee on Foreign Affairs Chair, Rep. Howard L. Berman (October 15, 2009)**

"I want you to know how much I, as Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, value my association with you and your colleagues at ATFP. Your integrity, your knowledge of the issues, and your unswervingly principled stand on behalf of peace and fairness -- as well as your deep commitment both to the land of your birth, Palestine, and your adopted homeland, America -- have all had a powerfully positive impact on discourse in Washington about the Middle East. You and your colleagues have also been an important influence on my own thinking about Middle East peacemaking and that of many of my colleagues in the Congress." ([Letter from Rep. Howard L. Berman](#))

**USAID Administrator Henrietta H. Fore (October 12, 2008)**

"I first want to offer my congratulations to Dr. Ziad Asali and the American Task Force on Palestine for their impressive achievements over the last five years. In addition to the dollars raised for noteworthy causes such as the Palestinian health institutions, Dr. Asali has been deeply involved in the support of the Palestinian Investment Conference in Bethlehem this past May, and the Palestinian Business Investment Forum on October 14th. ATFP's work in developing lines of communication among the United States, the Palestinian Territories, Israel, and regional communities continues to make an important difference." ([ATFP Third Annual Gala](#))

**Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs James K. Glassman (October 12, 2008)**

"I want to compliment you, Ziad, and the American Task Force on Palestine, for the tremendous work that you are doing to advance peace in the Middle East through the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel. I also want to applaud you for the establishment of the American Charities for Palestine and for your service as co-chair of the US-Palestinian Partnership, a critical public-private initiative to promote educational and economic opportunity for the Palestinian people." ([ATFP Third Annual Gala](#))

**Dr. Adnan M. M. Mjalli (October 12, 2008)**

"I want to thank you and thank Dr. Ziad Asali for finally, and his team, Naila and the ATFP team, to really bring the things that we have been looking for for a long time as Palestinians who came to this country. It is about time that Palestinians will start to think and act like Americans, and this is really the gist of the American Task Force on Palestine.

It is so important that Palestinians in this country think and act as Americans and appreciate the American system, the American way of doing things. After all, we are Americans. This country has provided us and given us the opportunity that was not given to us by any other country in the world. So, for that, that is why I do really appreciate the message, the depth of the message, that the American Task Force on Palestine has to send, and is sending and will send for the future to come." ([ATFP Third Annual Gala](#))

**President George W. Bush (October 17, 2007)**

"I appreciate the American Task Force on Palestine and its members for your dedicated efforts to support peace in the Middle East. By working together, we can build a brighter future for the Palestinian people and a more peaceful world for our children and grandchildren." ([Letter from President Bush](#))

**Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (October 17, 2007)**

"In its short existence, ATFP has become a prominent voice for the interest of both the American and the Palestinian people. It has become a voice that defines peace and the two-state solution as a core of a very real common national interest for both peoples. ATFP is a constructive voice that reflects the bright contrast between the silent majority's desire for peace and prosperity and the vocal minority that thrives on exclusion, disengagement and blind criticism. Your efforts, and those of similar minded

Arab and Palestinian-American organizations, will continue to be of the utmost importance whether now as attempts to reach peace are underway or in the future as we embark on building the Palestinian state." ([Letter from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas](#))

**President of AMIDEAST, Amb. Theodore Kattouf (October 17, 2007)**

"Dr. Ziad Asali and his dedicated staff are making significant sacrifices to promote what everyone here understands what is needed: a two-state solution based on justice, mutual security, and peaceful coexistence." ([ATFP Second Annual Gala](#))

**Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, Amb. R. Nicholas Burns (October 17, 2007)**

"I want to thank, Ziad Asali, and the American Task Force on Palestine for your leadership. Thank you for your support for our efforts to achieve a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians and to see the establishment, at long last, of an independent Palestinian State. You have truly been a voice for moderation and peace." ([ATFP Second Annual Gala](#))

**Renowned physician Dr. Theodore Baramki (October 17, 2007)**

"This is a wonderful mission and Dr. Asali and his colleagues ought to be congratulated for the efforts that they have put forward. I'm proud of the mission that you are accomplishing. And let us continue to go forward." ([ATFP Second Annual Gala](#))

**Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (Oct. 11, 2006)**

"I would first like to thank Dr. Ziad Asali for that wonderful introduction. But more importantly, I would like to thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to this very important cause, and for your friendship and counsel over my time as Secretary of State. Thank you very much for all that you do.

I know the commitment of the Palestinian people to a better future. I know firsthand the commitment of President Abbas and moderate Palestinians to that future. And I know the commitment of the people in this room and of the American Task Force on Palestine that one day indeed there will be a Palestinian state living side by side in peace with Israel.

I can only tell you that I, too, have a personal commitment to that goal because I believe that there could be no greater legacy for America than to help to bring into being a

Palestinian state for a people who have suffered too long, who have been humiliated too long, who have not reached their potential for too long, and who have so much to give to the international community and to all of us. I promise you my personal commitment to that goal." ([ATFP Inaugural Gala](#))

**Prince Turki Al-Faisal (Oct. 11, 2006)**

"You are shining examples for your fellow Palestinians and Americans across the globe. Those of you who we are celebrating tonight did not achieve your accomplishments by talking about them. You stood up to your critics and overcame your challenges. We all commend you. And I firmly believe we will all be able to look at each other some day and celebrate the actions we took to help bring peace and security and resolution to the challenges that face us today. God willing, this will be the case. But first we need to act." ([ATFP Inaugural Gala](#))

**Former White House Chief of Staff, Gov. John Sununu (Oct. 11, 2006)**

"I urge you to understand that events like this, support like this, and the impact of ATFP, does not happen by accident. It happens because you continually support the organization. Let staff members be hired, let messages be crafted, and let distribution of information take place that helps the United States craft a policy in the right direction. There are those pulling on the other side of the rope who do it very well, and what we have to do is to begin to emulate that process, so that there is a fair and balanced tug on the rope, that will make a difference in a short period of time." ([ATFP Inaugural Gala](#))

**Sen. Carl Levin (Oct. 11, 2006)**

"The ATFP is filling a much-needed role in Washington by promoting awareness of the importance of Palestinian statehood to American security. It is keeping the hope for two states, Israel and Palestine, living next to each other in peace and security vibrantly before us and for not allowing us as Americans to give up hope and to be in a state of despair because we are not yet there in the Middle East. We will get there and this organization will help us to get there." ([ATFP Inaugural Gala](#))

**[Q: Is ATFP "a two-man operation" as is sometimes claimed?](#)**

A: No. ATFP, while proud of its accomplishments, is a modestly-sized operation, to be sure. As it stands today, ATFP has 4 full-time paid staff, a number of occasional paid technical consultants, and unpaid interns and volunteers. It also has a pro bono president and a pro bono accountant who have both served the organization for over 10 years without any form of pay or other compensation of any kind. ATFP's President and

co-founder is Dr. Ziad J. Asali and its Executive Director is Ghaith al-Omari. For a full list of ATFP's current staff, click [here](#).

[Q: Does ATFP try to “sell” the opinions of the State Department to the Arab-American community?](#)

A: No. This is a malicious calumny designed to undermine ATFP's integrity and political standing and reputation. It would be beneath our dignity and professionalism to serve any government, including our own American one, and charges that we do so are intended to undermine the integrity and effectiveness of the Task Force. However, ATFP is proud and gratified that its founding mission from 2003 of establishing a Palestinian state has become the official policy of the US government for many years. ATFP has consistently engaged the government to try to help implement this policy goal. ATFP brings a Palestinian-American and Arab-American perspective to the State Department, the White House, Congress and the rest of the US government in a receivable message and effective manner. As a policy organization, ATFP works within the established frameworks of the policy-making and framing processes in Washington.

Beginning from the perspective of enhancing the American national interest, ATFP has made significant headway in impacting policy on Palestine by working within the system and with the establishment, as all other effective American groups have done. This is achieved primarily by developing strong, effective working relations, based on professionalism and mutual respect, with our own government, other American organizations and relevant groups and individuals in the Middle East and around the world. Throughout, the clear emphasis has been on building these relationships while maintaining ATFP's absolute independence of decision-making.

ATFP has publicly disagreed with US policy on a number of occasions, including [opposing the US veto](#) against the 2011 UN Security Council resolution on settlements, [arguing strongly against US cuts in aid](#) to the Palestinian people, and by [supporting boycotts](#) against Israeli settlement goods. The deep relationships we have made have been essential in allowing ATFP to help [secure the release of American funds](#) for the Palestinian people and other key instances in which we have successfully pushed back against majority opinion or public policy in Washington.

[Q: Doesn't ATFP sacrifice everything for access in Washington, but without enjoying any influence?](#)

A: No. First it must be clearly understood that there could be access without influence, but there certainly cannot be any influence without access. ATFP has earned its unprecedented degree of access, and has demonstrated, on numerous occasions that it also has acquired a measure of influence. This influence is limited but is positively disproportionate to ATFP's small size and limited resources. ATFP has been able to leverage its access into influence mainly by contributing value added in the form of ideas and contacts, enhancing the dialogue among the parties and contributing specific, principled and pragmatic policy ideas to promote a two-state solution and improve

conditions on the ground for the Palestinian people. Policy work, perhaps uniquely, places its practitioners in a particularly awkward position, insofar as if they do have an impact on policy, they cannot announce or claim such a success. To do so publicly would be the surest means to limit such access and thereby guarantee future ineffectiveness.

Yet there is no doubt that ATFP has had significant influence at crucial moments, affecting, for example, the level of US aid to the Palestinian Authority, which, at its peak, reached almost [\\$1 billion](#) a year. ATFP was also instrumental in changing the way much of Washington viewed the PA institution-building program, which was at first misrecognized as essentially an economic or development project. ATFP took the lead in convincing key institutions and officials in Washington that the policy was a political and strategic intervention and needed to be regarded and funded as such. For several years this helped to secure strong American support for the program.

Since its founding, ATFP's core positions have not changed at all but have remained steadfastly consistent and unwavering. It has therefore sacrificed nothing at all for its accomplishments, either with regard to the policy-making realm or with the Palestinian-American and Arab-American communities. Its work has been executed professionally and with a consistent focus on institutional integrity. No kind or amount of criticism, no matter how unfair, unfounded or unscrupulous, has diminished our commitment to our mission. That ATFP has not changed our fundamental goals or approach in 10 years of intense activity and achieved so much speaks for itself, and demonstrates clearly that we have not "sacrificed" anything for either the obvious access or the real influence that we have been able to accumulate.

[Q: Is ATFP a "Zionist group?"](#)

A: [No](#). Such laughable accusations are yet another a part of deliberate efforts to discredit ATFP and undermine its work and standing with Palestinians and Arabs everywhere. We support the Palestinian goal of independent statehood, led by the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, the PLO. ATFP has a strong commitment to the Palestinian people and to helping to secure their independent state.

But ATFP is first and foremost an American organization that foregrounds the American national interest, especially US interests in ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state. ATFP categorically opposes the occupation that began in 1967, but it does not oppose the State of Israel. Accordingly, ATFP has engaged in and promoted dialogue with Israel, Israelis and their Jewish-American supporters as an indispensable corollary to its mission and policies. ATFP is most frequently criticized for its commitment to this American national interest by those who do not approve of a two-state solution.

[Q: Is ATFP part of the "pro-Israel lobby?"](#)

A: No. This is yet another malicious and preposterous allegation made by those who would discredit ATFP because they oppose a two-state solution and peace with Israel. ATFP is not a “lobby group” at all, but more to the point it is an American organization that is pro-Palestine, and anti-occupation, but without being anti-Israel. Working for a two-state solution in Washington means engaging the broadest possible set of constituencies that either endorse, or are potentially amenable to, such an arrangement. This means building strong ties to other Arab-American organizations as well as pro-peace, Christian, Muslim, policy and other civil society groups that support ending the occupation and a two-state solution. This also crucially involves trying to build working relations with mainstream Jewish pro-Israel organizations. ATFP is a particularly innovative and effective pro-Palestinian and anti-occupation organization, because it seeks to build the largest possible coalition in favor of achieving this goal, which is the *raison d'être* guiding the Task Force from its outset.

[Q: Is ATFP a "Trojan horse" for radical Islamism or terrorism?](#)

A: ATFP has been frequently been subjected to this [outrageous defamation](#) by its Israeli ultra-nationalist, far right wing or Islamophobic detractors. This is an almost daily accusation on social media, and a frequent one on far right-wing websites and blogs. Like the false accusations that come from the far left, these ultra-right-wing calumnies are intended to undermine ATFP's reputation, standing and ability to function successfully. However, they are even more hideous and insidious in that they implicitly suggest that ATFP is not only disloyal to the United States, but potentially engaged in unlawful activity or supportive of violence and religious extremism.

Obviously ATFP and its staff have a long and unquestionable record of opposing violence and extremism of all forms. These accusations are not only lacking in substance, they are a total inversion of the actual positions, history and opinions of the organization and its supporters. It seems possible that some of those who level these accusations are aware of this, but are cynically exploiting antipathy towards Palestine, Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims in order to paint entire communities, societies and civilizations as alien, menacing and dangerous.

ATFP is a patriotic American organization that emphasizes the American national interest in its work. But this does not immunize the Task Force from being drawn into the generalized accusations against these communities. Such accusations are leveled because ATFP has the word "Palestine" in its name.

ATFP generally does not dignify such outrageous defamation with any kind of direct response, but rather lets its work speak for itself. We are secure in the knowledge that respectable American society, including the policy community in Washington, and most of our fellow citizens, understand that this kind of bigotry is not only baseless but also contemptible and downright dangerous.

[Q: Is ATFP out of touch with Palestinian sentiments?](#)

A: On the broadest policy questions, definitely not. Virtually all surveys over the past 20 years show [a solid majority of Palestinians](#) in favor of a two-state solution, which is the *raison d'être* of ATFP. Additionally, most Palestinians are in favor of reforms, good governance, transparency, accountability, anti-corruption measures and other programs to develop and improve their society, which ATFP also strongly supports. ATFP does, however, find itself at [odds with one-state advocates](#), radical Islamists, Israeli annexationists, and uncompromising strident nationalists on all sides who reject the compromises necessary for peace.

ATFP is consciously developing and refining a new approach to achieving goals, such as Palestinian independence, that are shared by the Palestinian majority. Some of these approaches may be misunderstood or under-appreciated because they are so new and different, and others because they are a work in progress. But the aims are precisely the same: to end the occupation, achieve Palestinian independence, build Palestinian society, and reform governance and economic structures to better serve the Palestinian people.

[Q: Why do some claim that ATFP was a Republican organization during the Bush administration, but switched to being a Democratic group during the Obama administration?](#)

A: The fact that this question is asked at all, and unfortunately it frequently is, demonstrates a relative unfamiliarity with how American nongovernmental and public educational organizations are actually structured and work. ATFP by both law and policy is a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan, nonpolitical organization, although it works within the policy realm on an issue that has been defined by a consensus to be national security interest. Such issues often transcend partisan political divisions. Therefore, ATFP never has been, and never will be, a functionary of any political party.

The misunderstanding arose due to the fact that ATFP was able to establish strong working relations with the executive branch quickly after it was founded in 2003, during the [Republican administration](#) of Pres. George W. Bush. But ATFP did not achieve its access and influence during the Bush administration by being Republicans or in any sense associated with the Republican Party or any of its apparatuses. Instead, ATFP was a relatively new Arab-American phenomenon: a genuinely American and genuinely nonpartisan organization that did not take sides or part in elections or partisan squabbles but instead focused on policy issues that continue through different election cycles no matter which party is in power. The question of Middle East peace and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is precisely such an issue. It remains an American national security imperative no matter who is elected or appointed to executive office or policymaking positions.

The woefully mistaken impression that ATFP was essentially a "Republican" organization because it had developed strong relationships with the Bush presidency gave rise to profound confusion in some quarters when the Task Force was able to maintain its ties to the executive branch under the [Democratic administration](#) of Pres. Barack Obama. One answer to this presumed conundrum was that ATFP must have suddenly switched, opportunistically, from being a Republican-oriented group to being a Democratic-oriented one. Not only is this absurd on its face, it misses the entire point of how the American policy process actually works. In fact, ATFP was never a "Republican" organization during the Bush administration, and it is not now a "Democratic" one either. ATFP does not get involved in partisan politics. As a policy organization, it instead seeks to work with whoever the American people elect as president or in Congress, and whatever group of policymakers are then appointed or promoted. Our ideas are based on consensus American views about foreign policy goals, above all the vital American national interest in securing a negotiated two-state solution based on the creation of a Palestinian state to live alongside Israel in peace, security and dignity.

ATFP has been able to develop and maintain strong relations with both Democratic and Republican administrations during its decade-long history because it has brought genuine value-added inputs to the policy making and framing conversations. ATFP can speak just as easily with Democratic or Republican policymakers or officials because core American interests do not change between elections and because ATFP does not take sides in those elections. ATFP notes that this question is never asked of the most influential and established American single-issue policy groups or commercial interests. It is taken for granted that American entities and organizations which have an interest in helping to influence, shape and realize American policy goals -- unless they are designed explicitly to be partisan and to help to determine election outcomes -- all work with both Democratic and Republican presidents and Congressional leaderships.

ATFP has been uniquely singled out in part because it is assumed by some that the normative American policy input system is somehow closed to Palestinian or Arab Americans. One of ATFP's most important accomplishments has been to demonstrate that this is not the case. Arab-Americans [are not shut out](#) of the system. They need not performe join the partisan political process, although that is an essential aspect of becoming fully engaged in the American system. And, indeed, ATFP has often felt the [lack of strong Arab-American political organizations](#) as it tries to approach its own policy work. But what ATFP has shown is that a non-partisan, non-political, policy-based Arab- and Palestinian-American organization can take part effectively and in a sustained manner in the policy conversation. While political groups are also needed, policy organizations that are not involved in partisan competition are indispensable.

Therefore, the simple answer is that ATFP was never a "Republican" organization in the first place, let alone has it switched to being a "Democratic" one. It is a nonpartisan organization, and it is precisely this standard American practice that has allowed it to maintain strong relations with administrations from both parties.

### [Q: How did ATFP President Ziad Asali gain access and influence in Washington?](#)

A: Dr. Asali spent many years working as a physician and leading community member in Taylorville, Illinois before relocating to Washington immediately after his retirement from the medical profession. During those years in Illinois, Dr. Asali had ample opportunity to learn how the fundamental American economic, political and social system operates, within smaller communities, on a statewide level and, by extension, nationally. The same essential processes and culture are operative across the board in our country. Dr. Asali, therefore, did not arrive in Washington directly from Palestine. Instead, he spent several decades of hard work and close examination of the way the American system operates before he began his full-time work with ADC and then ATFP.

It is, however, true that there are many other Arab-Americans who have spent more time in Washington but accumulated much less access and influence than Dr. Asali. In that sense, his relative success can appear uncannily swift. There are two primary reasons why this is the case.

First, Dr. Asali applied the lessons he had learned in the Midwest to Washington, understanding that the American system operates similarly across the board. Straightforwardness, consistency, transparency and discretion -- to name a few of the key attributes -- he found to be placed at a premium throughout American society. He was also able to develop and present, along with his colleagues, a series of policy interventions, initiatives, inputs and international contacts that were designed to help realize the consensus American policy position in favor of a two-state solution.

Second, because of the approach ATFP has pioneered, it did not find itself knocking on a locked door, as some anticipated. Rather, the primary question ATFP encountered upon its emergence in the Washington policy scene was not, "what are you talking about," but "where have you been?" Because ATFP was able to ensure that its clear commitment to the American national interest was widely recognized, and became noted for its consistency and integrity, its value-added was quickly understood by the policymaking and policy framing communities. To some extent, Dr. Asali and ATFP have been beneficiaries of a political version of the law of supply and demand: there simply hasn't been anything like it in the past, and its usefulness to the goal of creating a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine under American auspices, with strong Palestinian-American participation in the process, was quickly evident.

However, the real key to Dr. Asali and ATFP's successes has been following the time-honored and tested model of engaging with the American political and policy-making systems according to its long-established rules and structures, as all other successful American organizations, groups and individuals have. We have attempted, successfully, to work within the system, as it exists, rather than quixotically trying to change or challenge it. All the while we have held ourselves accountable to ourselves, our mission and our institutional integrity. In the process, Dr. Asali and ATFP have demonstrated

that the American policy-making system is, indeed, open to Palestinian and Arab Americans, their perspectives and their input, if they approach it with seriousness, integrity and a real commitment to our own American national interest.

[Q: Why is ATFP President Ziad Asali sometimes a target of angry criticism?](#)

A: This question, and its answers, could not be more revealing. Dr. Ziad Asali needs no lectures on the painful history of the Palestinian people and their suffering and tragedies over the past 65 years, having [experienced many of them firsthand](#). He became a refugee in 1948 when his family fled West Jerusalem for East Jerusalem during heavy fighting, in which his sister was wounded. His family can trace its written, documented history in Jerusalem back [at least 600 years](#). Dr. Asali was finishing medical school in Beirut in 1967, and was not permitted to live and work in East Jerusalem by the new Israeli occupation authorities following the war. His [family lost several properties](#) to the conflict and the Israeli occupation.

His views and positions have been shaped by the sum of a typical Palestinian experience, not only in the hardships endured but also the will and agency exercised to overcome these challenges. They were also shaped by his experience as an American, coming to the United States as an immigrant and being embraced by this country and given the opportunity to succeed and excel in his profession as a physician.

His belief in the justice of the Palestinian cause, the pressing, real need to end the occupation and realize a two-state solution as the only way to end the Palestinian plight, and his faith in the openness of the American system, are what drive his own work and that of ATFP.

Dr. Asali, who was the founder of ATFP, has worked full-time for the organization for over a decade without receiving any compensation of any kind. Indeed, he and his wife have annually contributed to ATFP out-of-pocket since its founding. All of his work has been entirely pro bono and completely uncompensated. In addition, his wife and fellow ATFP board member, Naila Asali, has also worked as a full-time volunteer at the Task Force for over 10 years. She had previously served as the Chair of ADC for five years. Given their professional careers and the value of their time, this in-kind contribution of labor must be calculated in the millions of dollars. "Sellout" is the last characterization that could possibly be made of the Asalis given that this is how they have chosen to spend their retirement and savings (although when informed of this, some critics have decided to dub them with the ludicrous oxymoron of "sellout for free.")

Dr. Asali has been the continuous target of vicious and personalized attacks by those who do not agree with ATFP's mission, goals, tactics and strategies. Despite this, he continued to contribute his time and energy without any recompense. Dr. Asali and ATFP have been accused of being "sellouts" on various issues, including refugee matters. But the use of "sellout" as a pejorative against Dr. Asali is also intended to express disapproval that he and ATFP work within the American political system and with the policy establishment. A commitment to working within the system and with the

establishment to pursue its mission is at the core of ATFP's approach.

Moreover, it is hardly within Dr. Asali's - or, for that matter, any individual's - ability to "sell," or in any other sense "give up," collective and individual rights that belong exclusively to the Palestinian people. They have a national leadership, and an internationally recognized body, the Palestine Liberation Organization, which is the only entity entitled to represent the Palestinians diplomatically and legally, and to negotiate on their behalf. Dr. Asali is not a member or official of the PLO, and does not take part in the negotiations, which will determine the outcome of all of these issues. He has not sought or accepted any official position with any government or governmental agency whatsoever.

This preposterous mischaracterization of Dr. Asali as a "sellout" is almost always a function of a broader attack on ATFP's carefully-thought through, purposeful policy of working with the policy establishment in order to both impact policy across the board and get things done on the ground to help the Palestinian people (see the [summary of some of ATFP's accomplishments](#)). This constructive, serious approach is the essential basis for what ATFP has been able to achieve at multiple registers and with very limited resources.

This deliberate policy of broad engagement was embarked on at ATFP's outset in 2003, in the full knowledge of the significant personal and political costs it would entail, because of the potential benefits they would likely have for the Palestinian people. ATFP's first decade of pursuing this policy has proven that these benefits can be real, tangible, meaningful and consequential, particularly in the daily lives of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.

Dr. Asali's entirely uncompensated and sustained commitment to ATFP over so many years is in keeping with the great American tradition of civic engagement. His hard-won personal standing in the Washington policy community and his demonstrable success in leading ATFP to unprecedented levels of access and influence is proof that our nation's policy-making process is as open to Palestinian Americans as it is to all other Americans.

Disagreement with Dr. Asali's views and ATFP's approach is natural and indeed healthy given the complexity and diversity of the Palestinian experience in the past and present. A vibrant debate and a multiplicity of approaches are needed to address the various facets of the Palestinian issue. What is neither natural nor healthy, however, are the attempts by some to silence him and others by arguing beyond the bounds of propriety and stooping to character assassination.

In particular, the deeply personal and insulting character of many of the false accusations leveled against Dr. Asali are not only outrageous, they actually impugn these critics themselves rather than Dr. Asali or ATFP. Decrying such a vicious attacks against Dr. Asali in 2002, the late Palestinian-American scholar [Edward Said described him](#) as "a public-spirited physician who voluntarily gave up his medical practice to run

the organization on a pro bono basis." Professor Said noted that it was precisely "*Because of this success under Asali*" [emphasis in the original] that he and his organization were being subjected to "a campaign of personal vilification masked as ideological argument." These attacks have continued until this very day, and have not changed in tone, substance or intent since 2002. [Professor Said cited](#) the campaign of personal invective against Dr. Asali which, if anything, has only intensified in the past 12 years, as a prime example of the crippling "disunity and factionalism" that plague Arab and Arab-American causes, particularly that of Palestine.

Dismissing Dr. Asali's deep and complex experience through ad hominem attacks – while simple and easy, no matter how unfair – does a disservice to the interests of the Palestinian people, the diversity of the Palestinian-American community, and – perhaps most importantly – the truth itself. The real answer to such criticism is the standing that ATFP and Dr. Asali have earned in the Washington policy community.

## **- ATFP and you**

### [Q: What can I do to help ATFP?](#)

A: All forms of support are welcome. Everyone is invited to call the ATFP office and inquire about what kind of support each individual or group might be best able to provide to the Task Force to help it pursue its mission. From the outset, ATFP has relied on its supporters around the country, as well as volunteers and [interns](#). We appreciate their generosity. But an extraordinarily large amount of work remains undone. We need your help and your support.

ATFP urges all Arab-Americans and others who sympathize or agree with its policies and approach to speak up publicly in support of us and the organization. Even rhetorical support is very important and greatly appreciated. Moreover, ATFP warmly welcomes all forms of support, including pro bono efforts, in-kind contributions, volunteer work and, of course, [financial donations](#).

ATFP seeks to build a network of people who support its mission and goals, and who are interested in advocacy for a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians. If you would like to add your name to our contact list, click [here](#). If you would like to volunteer to set up local events, panels, discussions, seminars, meet with us in your local area or so forth, ATFP staff and leaders would be grateful for the opportunity. Please [contact our office](#) directly to schedule such events and conversations. ATFP would also warmly welcome information about and contact with successful, engaged Palestinian Americans around the country whose work and contributions can be honored or otherwise made an even greater part of the mainstreaming process. If you are, or know of, an accomplished or distinguished Palestinian American in any field that might be interested in being in touch with ATFP, please let us know so we can be in contact, expand our network and promote their achievements.

If you have any questions, suggestions or requests, please [contact us directly](#). To contribute to ATFP's invaluable work, click [here](#). To inquire about other forms of support, please call the ATFP office at 202-887-0177 or email [info@atfp.net](mailto:info@atfp.net).