

## LIEBERMAN WANTS SAUDI PEACE PLAN RESTATED

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RIYADH--Likely presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman, on a 10-day tour of the Middle East, stated here yesterday that he has appealed to Crown Prince Abdullah, deputy premier and commander of the National Guard, to "find a way to restate his peace plan."

In an exclusive and wide-ranging interview with Arab News, the Connecticut senator described the peace initiative launched by the crown prince last March as a "missed opportunity."

"I made an appeal to the crown prince yesterday to find a way to restate it," he said.

"I had a very productive and enjoyable meeting with both King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah," he continued. "My message here is that it has been a difficult year for US-Saudi relations and I wanted to say personally that I remain committed to this relationship. So the first message was a message of reassurance, and the second was that while there has been expressions of anger and distrust from the American side these should be seen as disagreements among family and friends."

In view of the way bilateral relations have taken on a special significance after Sept. 11, Lieberman drew attention to the fear that "there is a small group of Islamic extremists" who, if given their way, would begin "a civilizational struggle" between Islam and the rest of the world.

"In that sense I see this conflict not just as Al-Qaeda against everyone else, but as a civil war within the Muslim world between a minority who are extreme and a majority that is ethical, moderate and non-violent. It's important to the Muslim world that the mainstream majority emerges victorious, and that's why Saudi Arabia--with its place at the center of the Muslim world--has such a critical role to play."

On the question of a future Palestinian state, which Lieberman has previously come out in favor of, the senator agreed that there "ought to be more" humanitarian aid given to the Palestinian people than is now allocated by the American administration.

"The human conditions are not acceptable," he added. "But I still feel optimistic that a peace agreement can be achieved by the Israelis and the Palestinians. I do think that if the gridlock that exists between the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples is ended then there is potential for them to be an example of how people of different faiths and nationalities can live together peacefully."

Asked if there was any double standard in the fact that he himself voted in favor of a US war crime tribunal to try Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as a war criminal while the US fought for and was given exemption from the newly created International Criminal Court (ICC), Lieberman said that he agreed there was.

"I disagree with the current administration's policy on this question," he stated. "The US was, in fact, over the years a moving party in establishing the ICC. It was very disappointing to me in the end that we refused to join it. I hope that we can come back to it because American foreign policy works best when we are true to our national ideals."

When asked about the fact that Israel has ignored and defied over 60 UN resolutions, Lieberman accepted that "Israel should be no more immune from international law than any other nation."

"But Israel is not a danger to its people and its neighbors in a way that Iraq under Saddam is. Obviously, from an American point of view, we feel over the years that the UN has been slanted against Israel and doesn't give Israel a fair deal."

On the domestic front, Lieberman said that he was "proud" of his relationship with the Arab-American community.

"Right now we are faced with trying to balance liberty with security, but we can't allow our reaction to the terrorist attacks to induce us to compromise our own values. I think we should constantly review the laws that have been adopted post Sept. 11 to make sure that we are not compromising the liberties of any American."

Lieberman expressed his hope that he may one day become the first-ever Jewish president of the United States, but insisted that "this does not mean that if a Jewish American runs for office that person will automatically be elected." "Such a candidate will be judged on his merits and not on his faith," he insisted. "This is based on the real experience that I had as a vice presidential candidate in 2000, when I felt that I was greeted not just with tolerance but acceptance as a fellow American."

