

Rep. Adam Smith: We have Israel's back

JANIS SIEGEL JTNews Correspondent

At a community briefing at Seattle's Temple De Hirsch Sinai, Rep. Adam Smith (D-9th District) used a long checklist to discuss America's role in the Middle East: The Obama administration's actions in the region, characterized by caution; remaining disengaged in Syria; top-level diplomacy through Secretary of State John Kerry's frequent trips; economic support; and a prudent military component in the region.

At the event organized by the left-leaning Israel advocacy organization J Street, Smith, whom it endorses, also said he was waiting for a formal White House plan outlining its approach toward Syria, which is in the midst of an increasingly combustible sectarian civil war. The growing violence there has left 80,000-plus dead and threatens the safety of Israel and the stability in the region.

"I'm still waiting for someone to put a plan on the table, but I haven't seen it," said Smith, the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee. "It's the most dangerous situation we face on the globe today."

According to observers, the U.S. must commit to some involvement going forward in Syria because several American allies that share a border with the majority Sunni Islamic country have already been drawn into hostilities that have spilled across their borders.

At the same time, however, Syrian President Bashar Assad's allies have come to his aid. Russia sent Assad an assortment of its newest high-tech defensive missiles and it has been widely reported that Iran has mobilized and armed Hezbollah inside the country.

According to Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who recently returned from stealth meetings there with the anti-Assad rebel factions, the insurgents deserve U.S. support.

Smith expressed some of the president's caution, recognizing that the alliances that undergird the longtime Syrian president are formidable.

"We should not support regime change," Smith said. "We don't have a group of viable people to support. The opposition to Assad is somewhat splintered and dangerous. We can make it worse. He's got enough firepower that can last."

However, he said the breakdown of a fragile peace in Egypt and the general unrest in neighboring countries could have catastrophic consequences for Israel.

"The implications for Israel are profound indeed," Smith said, "but we can't just show up and tell Egypt and Libya how to run their government. We need an eco-



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Rep. Adam Smith speaks at Temple De Hirsch Sinai at an event for the J Street Israel advocacy organization.

nomics plan in that region. We need to be strategic about it. We have to find a way to be engaged.

"I'm cautiously optimistic that the peace [with Morsi] will hold," he added.

However, Smith was unequivocal and direct about the U.S.'s commitment to Israel.

"Israel is our most critical ally and we must make it clear to all the parties that we will have their back," he said. "That is fundamental and it is a vital national security interest."

In contrast to President Obama's recent speech on military policy going forward when he asserted that the terror threat, in general, is subsiding, Smith noted that the terror threat is still very real. He recalled events that originally led the U.S. into the fight against radical Islamic extremism.

"Al-Qaeda declared war on the U.S. in 1996," said Smith. "There are some very dangerous people that are threatening us and we can't back down from that."

While in Rome in May, Secretary Kerry met with Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni and Qatar's prime minister, according to reports. In Washington, D.C., Kerry met for a second time with Livni and he also met with the PLO chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat and Jordan's foreign minister. During a return trip to the Middle East, Kerry met separately with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas.

"I urge against preconditions," said Smith, who told the crowd he traveled to Israel and the surrounding territories in 2005 and 2011. "A two-state solution is the only sustainable path forward and the U.S. has to be part of it. The economic development in the West Bank has been critical."

Speaking more broadly concerning his vision for the future of the region as a whole, Smith said that economic development and diplomacy are crucial, but there must be a dialogue of cooperation with younger generations to affect lasting change and to help them believe in the possibility of a true peace process.

"The clash of civilizations needs to be

Man's best friend, cancer's worst enemy?

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More and more, scientists are becoming intrigued by the possibility that dogs may be uniquely sensitive to the distinctive smell of a cancer cell and that they may someday play a crucial role in saving the lives of patients affected by cancer.

Recently, an Israeli researcher at Ben Gurion University of the Negev decided to see if letting the hypersensitive olfactory skills of a trained dog might prove to be accurate enough to warrant further testing.

Dr. Uri Yoel, an instructor at BGU who also specializes in internal medicine at BGU's Health Sciences department, didn't even wait for funding to begin the first-phase test of these dogs in his lab.

Intrigued by several anecdotal accounts around the world during the last decade from dog owners who claimed that their pet continually barked at a particular site on their body no matter how much they tried to distract it, Yoel initiated an admittedly small study with only two dogs to test the phenomenon.

Yoel's first experiment, having the dogs identify cancer cells in a Petri dish, showed great potential.

He found that dogs can, in fact, smell, differentiate, and identify various cancers.

Once trained, Yoel's canines achieved a 100 percent success rate, correctly distinguishing healthy, non-cancerous breast cancer cells from cancerous ones they found in separate cell culture plates.

"All smells leave a molecular footprint," said Yoel, "but with something like breast cancer, it was hard to understand how this worked. The dogs were taught to smell only breast cancer cell cultures but were tested also for their ability to recognize lung cancer and melanoma cell cultures. They scored a perfect 100 percent in all cases."

Over a decade of individual accounts of cancer detection by dogs showed that they correctly identified skin and lung cancer, which Yoel understood, because these smells are exhaled in a person's breath or on their skin. But could a dog smell breast cancer, or other cancers inside the body, he wondered?

"Our research proves that dogs can smell cancer cells in vitro [outside the body] and that different types of cancer share the same smell print," continued Yoel. "Again, we cannot know for sure if in vivo [inside the body], the dogs are reacting to the

brought out into the open and addressed," said Smith. "It's real and it's tangible. It's about working with the broader group on ideology so that people don't turn to these [radical] groups."

Smith blamed the ongoing upheavals in leadership and protests in many Muslim



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cancer itself or to the body's reaction to it. I think that the cancer itself has a special smell print that the animals detect though it may be a combination of the two factors."

Researchers are still not quite sure what the animals actually smell, but Yoel has observed that "different types of cancer share the same smell print."

Since the first documented case of canine cancer detection about a decade ago, two

women in the United Kingdom have claimed that their pets alerted them to lumps in their breasts by gently "pawing" at the area or otherwise signaling them. Both women were prompted to see their doctor and both women had malignant lumps.

Still, despite his results, it was not clear to Yoel if the dogs were correctly identifying the cells because of the human body's own reaction to the cancer, which itself emits its own distinctive odor, due to either cell death or inflammation.

In addition, even if further study proved conclusively that dogs could reliably identify cancers in humans, the question remains as to how they might be used in the diagnostic setting when significant numbers of cases would need screening.

Encouraged by this first round of results, Yoel is going forward with a second phase of research with the cancer-sniffing canines, although he is looking for funding to further his work. He will need to hire two dog trainers, locate a facility to conduct the research, recruit hundreds of smokers with early-stage lung disease along with more than 100 dogs, according to BGU staff.

Training dogs to identify cancer cells is a relatively easy process, say dog-training experts, because it comes naturally to them and their acute sense of smell can be adapted to most settings. Doctors only need to introduce the dog to a particular scent or cell, and they get a reward when they respond to it during training.

Once the dogs are trained to alert for lung cancer by identifying the scent of those study participants who have the disease, Yoel will test again to determine whether they can pick out the subjects on their own.

"Even before we start training the dogs, we must see if they are suitable for this type of work," said Yoel. "We need to see the dogs' qualities as puppies and to trace their development. All this takes time — and modest resources."

countries in the Middle East on "unsustainable governments" where the people "were shut out, shut down, and not provided for."

"They need economic support, political freedom, and hope," said Smith. "We've got to work with the populations."