

The American–Israeli Relationship: Past and Future

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The date is May 14, 2008, and President Shimon Peres' first international conference is in high gear. An evening at the concert hall of *Binyanei HaUma* in Jerusalem is packed with participants (speakers, donors, other dignitaries) and representatives from around Israel, including the IDF and residents of Sderot.

The occasion is a celebration of Israel's sixtieth anniversary in the presence of the president of the United States and the First Lady. In that light, it turns into a gala in praise of the US–Israeli relationship and a gigantic thank-you from the people of Israel to the people of the United States. President Peres and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert each deliver a history lesson on what each US president has done for Israel during the sixty years of its existence. Their remarks are interspersed with a five-screen video on how wonderful each president has been. They all receive praise, even when it's a stretch, but naturally the president seated in the hall in the first row comes in for special plaudits.

Two huge video screens are trained on George W. and Laura Bush throughout the evening, and it appears there are a few tears shed by the two distinguished guests, especially the First Lady. When President George W. Bush's time comes to speak, he is brief, expresses his gratitude, and promises that his major public address in Israel will be delivered the next day at the Knesset.

Aside from all the celebratory speeches and video, there is another part of the program. Male dancers from the United States and Israel, solo pianists from both countries, and most impressively to this author, two choirs singing together through a video connection—a boys choir from Baltimore and a largely female choir from Beit Yitzhak in Israel perform. The Americans chant *Let It Be* and the Israelis sing *Lu Yehi* ["Would that It Be"] in a stirring symbol of unity between the two countries.

The evening is meant to be an inspirational, even awesome, presentation of Israeli–American amity, and it largely is. But to this author, the prestigious speakers and the video focused on the past; the performers, by dancing, singing and playing the piano in unison symbolize a better future in which the US and Israel form a more productive partnership.

As for the history of the Israeli–American relationship, the one presented that night is deceptive. The affiliation evolved over time, actually in three phases. Through most of the sixty years, it was not nearly as cordial as it is today. However, before we can understand the basis of a new partnership, we must review the past.

Phase 1 (1948–1967): Israel at a Distance and as a Burden

In the period from the emergence of the State of Israel to the Six-Day War, American leaders generally saw the fledgling Jewish state as a burden cast upon the United States by dint of circumstance. Israel was viewed as an unwanted liability, an irritating responsibility in a period of confrontation with the USSR. Israel's democracy and Judeo-Christian attachment to the Holy Land solidified popular attachment. But it is worth noting that during this entire period, no major foreign policy figures (no secretaries of state and defense, no CIA directors, no American ambassadors to the United Nations, no national security advisors) established themselves as major supporters of Israel. President Harry S. Truman recognized the Jewish State within eleven minutes of its existence because he did not want to let the Soviet Union become the first country to do so. But he also removed himself from what he considered a thankless Arab–Israeli issue as soon after 1948 as he could.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower voiced the foreign policy community's fears and resentment toward Israel in a vociferous manner, sentiments that others would only whisper. His main objective toward Israel was to keep America's distance from the Jewish state. The writers of the Peres conference video devoted their thirty seconds on his presidency to his role in the liberation of the concentration camps about eight years before he entered the White House.

President John F. Kennedy, in part out of political necessity, talked about a US–Israeli "special relationship," but in reality was preoccupied with more pressing issues such as Cuba and Berlin.

In this phase, only President Lyndon B. Johnson had made a major splash through much of his career by praising the country for which he had "great admiration and affection." Israel compared favorably with his own achievements on the Pedernales

where he, too, had made deserts bloom. The analogy between the Alamo and Massada was never far below the surface. Yet, when the moment of truth came in 1967, he was preoccupied with Vietnam and pleased to let Israel handle matters itself. It is a forgotten corollary of the Vietnam War that the brief Mideast battle that was to so profoundly color Arab–Israeli history thereafter occurred in part because the United States was preoccupied elsewhere. Throughout this period until just before the Six-Day War, American policy guaranteed that Israel was provided major aid, and especially arms, by other countries (France, Germany, Britain, etc.). Indeed, American arms did not play a significant role in Israel’s victory.

Phase 2 (1967–1992): American Ambivalence Toward Israel

The Six-Day War, in any case, had a profound impact on American–Israeli relations and would, in time, transform them. To American leaders, the war had demonstrated that Israel was indeed the prime military power in the area, providing a new dimension to the perspective of Israel as a potential benefit to American interests. These considerations were reinforced in mixed fashion by the War of Attrition in 1969–1970 when, despite setbacks and errors, Israel provided the US with captured Soviet equipment. Another major impetus was the September 1970 crisis, when the very possibility of Israeli intervention on King Hussein’s behalf in Jordan seemed to save him, especially from a potential Syrian attack.

The ambivalence toward Israel in President Richard M. Nixon’s first term was epitomized by the differing perspectives advocated by National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger versus the older State Department approach pursued by Secretary of State William Rogers. To Kissinger, there would be no movement on the Arab–Israeli front until the Arabs, especially the Egyptians, recognized that only the United States had leverage on both the Arab states and Israel. To Rogers and his followers, the traditional method of pressuring Israel to make concessions in order to facilitate diplomatic movement was critical. But by the outbreak of the October 1973 war, the US was preoccupied with the growing American dependency on Mideast oil and preventing Israeli preemption. “Old-think” constantly competed with new perspectives.

The war’s aftermath, accompanied by the Arab oil embargo, the gas lines at home and the memory of a Soviet–American nuclear confrontation, might all have contributed to the collapse of American–Israeli relations. Instead, these events elicited mixed results—two disengagement accords and, under President Gerald R. Ford, a major agreement between Israel and Egypt through Kissinger’s famous “shuttle diplomacy.” But Ford also demonstrated his frustration with Israel by

conducting a controversial but inconclusive “reassessment” of US–Israeli relations in 1975.

Ambivalence towards Israel continued during the Carter administration, which from its opening moments considered Israeli policy, then still under the Labor Party, to be too rigid and inflexible toward the Arab side. In the estimation of all of its key foreign policy figures, the best means to solve the energy crisis was to sponsor comprehensive peace between the Israelis and the Arabs. Bolstered by the accession to power of the Likud under Menachem Begin, the process of reaching an Israeli–Egyptian peace treaty reinforced the prevailing notion in the administration of Israeli intransigence.

Ronald Reagan was the first president to truly perceive Israel as an American strategic asset, an outlook reinforced in his own mind by the fall of the Shah. He made his approach clear in an article in the *Washington Post* in the summer of 1979. But the initial simplicity of his views was challenged by his administration’s divergence with Likud policies, which he discovered in his first two years in office. These differences were manifested in the conflicts with Israel over the sale of AWACS jets to Saudi Arabia and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in mid-1982. The evolution of the new relationship with Israel he had originally envisioned only began to evolve with Prime Ministers Shamir and Peres in the latter two-thirds of his presidency.

The fragility of this new approach to Israel was dramatically demonstrated by President George H.W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker. Particularly opposed to Shamir’s foot-dragging on the Palestinian issue and the Israeli prime minister’s passionate support of settlements, the administration was dominated by a notion heavily felt in the Ford and Carter administrations that Israeli policy was a net detriment to American interests in the area. Though Bush’s policy would likely have been more benign toward an Israel led by Yitzhak Rabin (especially on loan guarantees), the administration’s fundamental perspective harked back to the 1970s, with even a touch of Eisenhower’s approach inherent in the notion that American policy success in the region required an Arab–Israeli settlement and that Israel was primarily responsible for the delays in making progress. The idea that American policy should not be too identified with Israel was back again.

Bush and Baker’s diplomatic capability was epitomized by the skills they demonstrated in the run-up to the Persian Gulf War in forming a large regional alliance against Iraq’s Saddam Hussein. It was reinforced afterwards in the talent that they demonstrated in setting up the Madrid Conference in 1991 and the bilateral and multilateral talks that followed. It has recently become fashionable with some analysts to imply that it is quite possible, even probable, that an Israeli–

Palestinian and/or Syrian–Israeli deal might have been struck in Bush’s second term if he had been reelected. Whether that argument has merit (and obviously we will never know for sure), the important point for our purposes is that the Bush team shared several of its predecessors’ ambivalence about Israel and its policies as far as American interests were concerned.

Phase 3 (1993–Present): The Embrace of Israel

The storied American–Israeli relationship described in May at the Peres Conference really only began in 1993 with the accession of Bill Clinton to the presidency and his consistently strong support for Israel, a pattern which has continued through the two terms of Bush the younger’s presidency. Whatever their differences in diplomatic skill, method, and the fundamental premises of their foreign policies, both presidents approached Israel as a genuine partner, even ally, of the United States.

With the exception of small hiccups during the period of the Netanyahu prime ministership in the mid-1990s and the early months of the Bush presidency, the remarkable fact is how little this basic assumption was disputed in both administrations. While secretaries of state might occasionally try to push Israeli policies in an altered direction, sentiment has shifted to blame Arab diplomacy and violence for the problems the US was confronting. This was an approach previously unimaginable except for the middle period of the Reagan administration, when the Arab side was blamed, but not vociferously, for the failure of the Reagan peace plan and the collapse of the incipient Israeli–Lebanese peace treaty.

Now, however, the fundamental conception has shifted to the view of Israel as the victim, a popular perspective in many quarters of American society and Congress long before 1993, but not in the Executive branch. Why the change? What happened? There are several explanations:

- The end of the Cold War led to an erosion of the obstacles to closer ties with Israel, but new global conditions had the effect of creating a novel division among Americans interested in the Jewish state. Instead of the old unity against “Arabists,” there was now a new debate among supporters of Israel as to what being pro-Israeli actually meant that had the ironic result of strengthening the US embrace by the Clinton and Bush administrations.
- Beginning with Rabin, Israel now appeared for the first time as the party ready to make concessions—in Oslo, at Camp David, with disengagement from Gaza, in talk about withdrawal from most of the West Bank and

even in a possible departure from the Golan. In the political arena, the Israelis were now cast as more forthcoming than Yasir Arafat or Syria's Hafez Assad, more effective than their successors, Mahmoud Abbas and Bashir Assad and incomparably more benign than Hamas and Hizbullah. Seemingly with the help of all these Arab parties, Israel has prevailed in the American imagination in a way that was never true previously. After all, in the 1950s, Israel was in conflict with Arab states. Now it was confronting violent networks opposed directly to American policies and interests. In the 1950s some Arab states aligned with the enemy. Today, individual Arab entities are the central terrorist adversary.

- The attacks of 9/11 created a genuine basis for a US–Israeli alliance in the global war on terrorism that had not previously existed.
- The mistrust of Arab intentions that was at the heart of much of the opposition to Rabin and his successors' more conciliatory policies were manifested in the Jewish religious and secular Right from the 1990s. Though a minority in the American Jewish community, this group was more intense in its activities and heavily influenced by Likud thinking, often even more hawkish than the Likud party itself. This opposition to any Israeli concessions emerged as a powerful force in the American Jewish community.
- Oslo exacerbated the split among Israel's supporters. On the one hand, there were those who believed with the Likud and the rest of the Israeli Right that Israeli security (some thought it destiny, too) demanded that Israel hold on to all remaining occupied territories in the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan. The other side of the American political scene agreed with Labor that Israel would be stronger in terms of security and healthier in terms of democracy and society if it would relinquish those same territories. Oslo and the sporadic Israeli–Syrian talks seemed to suggest to many in America and Israel that this was an historic moment not to be missed. Certainly, the Clinton administration, backed by many in the foreign policy community, the Jewish community and the Democratic Party, took this view.
- Israel's own diminished interest in the occupied territories as it developed during the Clinton and Bush administrations would seemingly have reinforced this perspective. But the Republican takeover of the House of Representatives for the first time in forty years in 1994 brought a more conservative representation to Congress. Many new members had not previously been exposed to foreign policy issues like the Arab–Israeli dispute. As they waded into these matters, the arguments against Israel making concessions to terrorists or conceding part of the Holy Land

had a greater impact than the idea of peace treaties with Syria and the Palestinians. Meanwhile, the religious Right in America had for several years been focusing more centrally on Israel. A Republican Congress, the mobilization of pro-Israel Christian forces, and the emergence of a more vociferous Jewish Right presented a powerful American coalition against Oslo—even in its heyday in the 1990's.

It was not long before these groups were throwing Congressional roadblocks in the way of the Clinton administration's efforts to move the peace process forward. The most dramatic example was the nearly successful effort in Congress in 1995 to relocate the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, an act which would have been so "in your face" to the Arab side it would have undoubtedly torpedoed the peace process and the US position. Even the Rabin government quietly opposed it.

Another sign of the times was the transformation of Senator Robert Dole, the 1996 Republican presidential candidate, from a tepid to enthusiastic supporter of Israel. From now on, no one could run for president on a Republican ticket who was not, at least verbally, a solid proponent of close American-Israeli ties. The days of Eisenhower, Ford, George H.W. Bush and Israel critic Pat Buchanan were over. The Republican Party now portrayed itself as the party of Israel, with the Democrats trying to play catch-up and downplaying their far-left wing. To the discomfort of long-time Democratic supporters of Israel, which included the overwhelming majority of its political leadership, polls regularly began to show a higher percentage of Republicans than Democrats supporting Israel.

The result of this political sparring, with each party trying to demonstrate that it was closer to Israel and a more reliable supporter, was an unprecedented intense competition between the two parties, reaching a new vehemence hitherto unknown in American politics on the subject.

With the advent of the Bush administration, 9/11 and the early influence of the neo-cons, the peace process skeptics had captured the leadership of an administration for the first time. Though the president and his secretary of state discovered the importance of supporting Israeli-Palestinian talks in their last eighteen months, their efforts were timid and ineffective. For the first time, the United States actually tried to discourage Israel from talking to one of the Arab parties in the conflict about withdrawing from territory and making peace, in this case Syria.

The implications of this third phase are profound. American policy has come full circle from the 1950s when the kind of embrace and identification with Israel we see now was viewed as anathema to American interests. The manifestation of

this new approach can be perceived in the 2008 presidential campaign. By now, no statement of support for Israel is too strong, no commitment too deep. For example, both candidates, John McCain and Barack Obama, spoke at the

American–Israel Public Affairs Convention (AIPAC) in June. The reader is challenged to identify which candidate spoke which of the following two statements:

Statement 1

And I will bring to the White House an unshakeable commitment to Israel's security. That starts with ensuring Israel's qualitative military advantage. I will ensure that Israel can defend itself from any threat—from Gaza to Tehran. Defense cooperation between the United States and Israel is a model of success, and must be deepened. As president, I will implement a Memorandum of Understanding that provides \$30 billion in assistance to Israel over the next decade—investments to Israel's security that will not be tied to any other nation. First, we must approve the foreign aid request for 2009. Going forward, we can enhance our cooperation on missile defense. We should export military equipment to our ally Israel under the same guidelines as NATO. And I will always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself in the United Nations and around the world.

Statement 2

And today, when we join in saying “never again,” that is not a wish, a request, or a plea to the enemies of Israel. It is a promise that the United States and Israel will honor, against any enemy who cares to test us. The threats to Israel's security are large and growing, and America's commitment must grow as well. I strongly support the increase in military aid to Israel, scheduled to begin in October. I am committed to making certain Israel maintains its qualitative military edge. Israel's enemies are too numerous, its margin of error too small, and our shared interests and values too great for us to follow any other policy.

Although the first statement is from Obama and the second from McCain, they are clearly indistinguishable. Given the state of the US–Israeli embrace, we have reached a point where no viable presidential candidate can overtly question the US–Israeli relationship. Thus, Obama has a pre-presidential record that is as strong as any Democrat in US history, surpassed only by Al Gore, who had the advantage of a longer record and an Orthodox Jewish vice-presidential nominee. John Kerry also had a strong record, but from a die-hard pro-Israeli perspective, he made several statements that his Republican opponents pounced upon as unacceptable.

On Israel, Obama has not made these mistakes, but he did face a problem when he clarified his remarks after his well-received AIPAC speech in June 2008 to reflect a somewhat weaker statement on Jerusalem from a right-wing pro-Israeli perspective. He has moreover only been in the Senate for four years, and many of Israel's supporters have come to expect a longer record. He is also running against a Republican who has taken almost the identical position to his own, but in the minds of some Israeli supporters, the Chicagoan has appeared to be over-eager to talk to Iran. Moreover, his now-famous former pastor has made statements severely critical of Israel. McCain, in contrast, has the strongest record of any pre-presidential Republican candidate in history, for a longer period, and, in a context of greater reliance on the military instrument and the use of power.

As we see in Obama and McCain's statements quoted above, after 9/11, supporting Israel militarily has been sold as the true test of a pro-Israel position. But we also see that a candidate's stance toward Israel is judged in terms of his past associations and his attitudes on issues beyond Israel. In this respect, McCain's choice as running mate of Sarah Palin, whose total lack of foreign policy experience, in contrast to long-time Israel supporter Joe Biden and Obama's own toughening statements toward Iran, suggest a much more complex Israel calculus as the campaign continues.

The 2008 campaign, in which for the first time since 1952 no incumbent president or vice president is running to lead the United States, is a good barometer of the state of the American-Israeli relationship. It suggests an unprecedented competition in America on who is better for Israel. And unfortunately for the Democrats, the Republicans have captured the high ground by defining pro-Israel in rhetorically hawkish and pugnacious terms, to the extent that neither candidate is prepared to reveal in anything but the vaguest of terms how he might act as president towards Israel and its neighbors.

Is this a healthy relationship? That depends on how one defines the term and what one wants as an outcome for the US-Israeli connection. If the objective is constant pronouncements of amity and overt affection, as demonstrated at the gala event in Jerusalem on May 14, then all is well between Washington and Jerusalem. If one seeks a deeper context in which actions become as important as atmosphere, then it is time to take a second look. It is certainly the case that Israel was mistreated in its early days and by several administrations, creating over the years of danger and insecurity an understandable sense in Israel that no distance between Washington and Jerusalem is safe.

But it is also true that dependence on a rhetorical embrace and a common perspective in this third phase could unravel. As two political scientists, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, revealed in a harsh and inaccurate book in 2007, there are those in the foreign policy establishment who do not view this third phase positively and would gladly return to the period of ambivalence, even to the resentment and distance of the pre-1967 period. The deep rift over policy toward Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine offers ample opportunity for divisiveness between Israel and the United States, even in the ever-outwardly friendly Bush administration. Only if one assumes that Israel is now unassailable in American politics, and that the evolution of phases as described above is irreversible, could a supporter of Israel be satisfied with the current relationship.

Present policies certainly have advantages for Israel. They aid the Jewish state's deterrence and confidence by propounding a close US–Israel relationship, improved by the growth in military assistance. For the US, they express the majority popular opinion and support a democratic anchor in a sea of chaos. Israeli achievements in such basic elements of homeland security as the protection of ports and airports provide important services. It is not accidental that so many local American communities have made deals with Israeli agencies and consultants to aid them in protecting key elements of their infrastructure.

But there are deficits. The relationship is incomplete and overly ideological. It promotes a lowest common denominator that works against positive movement in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians and Israel and Syrians in order to maintain unity. It serves as an impediment to diplomatic progress because any division is seen as a threat to the overall embrace. Most important, a relationship based on an embrace is epitomized by repeated expressions of affection and commitment, as we have seen in the 2008 presidential campaign and witnessed at the annual AIPAC conferences. Such passionate reaffirmations are reflective of an immature and/or fledgling relationship, not a solid and robust connection. Instead, I believe it is time to move ahead to a fourth phase that I call “partnership,” which would maintain the closeness of the US–Israeli security relationship but also build on the past to overcome the weaknesses of the current period.

Phase 4: Partnership

Critical building blocks in developing the bonds between the two countries and in constructing a new partnership rest on Israel's position as a democracy, the memory of the Holocaust and the identification of American Jews and Christians with the Holy Land and with Israel as a Jewish State. And, in this vein, a geopolitical and strategic understanding or consensus between the two countries on the importance

of dealing directly with the Arab–Israeli conflict in order to settle it once and for all would be a further basis for intensified cooperation. But I believe that a new basis for the relationship can facilitate this strategic understanding by intensifying the trust and economic ties between the two countries.

Many analysts are well aware of Israel’s high-tech prowess. After all, Warren Buffett invested \$4 billion for an 80 percent stake in ISCAR, Israel’s well-known precision tool company. And Israel is second only to Canada in the number of foreign firms appearing on US stock markets. Ninety percent of Israeli homes have solar water heaters and the country specializes in solar power. It is the world leader in the use of solar energy per capita—3 percent of the country’s primary national energy consumption. Indeed, Israel’s Solel Boneh concern is in the process of building the largest solar plant in the world in the Mojave Desert of California.

In computers and in telephonics, Israel has had major achievements too. One of its companies developed the software for barcode scanners used in stores all over the world; the technology for the cell phone was first developed by researchers in Israel. In health, the pill-cam, the ingestible video camera that travels through the intestines to diagnose cancer, was first developed in Israel. Israeli researchers are at the forefront of cancer research, generating molecules that aggressively target and attack cancerous cells. In agriculture, Israeli engineers developed drip irrigation, a system that releases small amounts of water next to crops and plants, an innovation that has revolutionized the agricultural industry. These, of course, are but some of the innovations that Israeli high-technology companies and scientists have produced.

Of course, there are a number of important government-level cooperative efforts between the US and Israel in these fields. For example, the Binational Science Foundation; the Binational Industrial Research and Development Foundation (BIRD), the Binational Agricultural Research and Development Fund (BARD); the Science and Technology Commission; and the more recent energy cooperation program between the two countries and the US–Israel High Technology Forum.

All of these are significant and have played critical roles over the years, but a new US–Israeli relationship should focus on areas of cooperation in such areas as alternative energy, the environment, and health, and would combine in major ways the private and public sectors in both countries. My personal favorite for an early joint project is in the alternative energy field where Israel, followed by Denmark, has committed itself to adopting an electric car over the next three years. A company called Better Place is working with Israel to develop the new application based on cellular phone-type technology. It maintains that its formula

can be applied to the United States, where the cost of deploying this infrastructure across the entire country would be less than 20 percent of the cost of a single year's worth of oil imports. Better Place documents argue that with an additional cost it claims is affordable, the electricity for the fleet could be supplied from renewable sources.

This process would have important environmental implications, it maintains, enabling the US to meet the obligations envisioned under the Kyoto agreement. Renault will produce the electric cars to be used in Israel and Denmark, but a US company could conceivably be the prime auto producer in the United States, creating American jobs in the process. The CEO of Better Place is a dynamic Israeli—Shai Agassi—whose company is actually based in Silicon Valley. So the fundamentals of an Israeli—American partnership are embedded from the outset. Whether this project and/or others emerge as the focus of a new US—Israeli partnership, the point is that the two would be solving major global problems—and together (not excluding other countries that might be engaged as well). This new mechanism would create an innovative and extremely healthy dynamic in the relationship between Washington and Jerusalem—joint efforts for mutual and global good.

It would also alter past patterns in the US—Israeli liason. In the past, the divergent sizes of the two countries led to an inherent tension between their perspectives, even in the halcyon third phase. But in this conception, the advantages the two countries bring to the table complement each other. As President Shimon Peres recently stated in an interview,

Israel, you know, is too small of a country to become a world market and too small a country to become a great world producer, but we have enough scientists per square kilometer to become a world laboratory. And smallness has its own advantages; when you are small you can be really daring, you can be a pilot plant. You cannot, for example, try a car like Shai Agassi's in Texas. It is too large and would be too costly and complicated. Here we can do it on a human scale and eventually extend it and expand it.

The first three phases have all actually been chained to the Arab—Israeli conflict. In the phase of resentment, the US distanced itself from Israel because of its concern for maintaining close ties with as many Arab states as possible. In the period of ambivalence, it was again the Arab—Israeli conflict that created the uncertainty toward Israel in the first place. Otherwise, Israel's dramatic victory in the Six-Day War with its demonstrated military ability would have led to closer ties and more quickly.

In the third phase, the impact of the Arab–Israeli conflict is more complex. The USSR no longer serves as the deterrent to American engagement, and after 9/11, the Arab states have burdens of their own that sometimes unfairly impede US–Arab ties. The result is that the impediments to an improved US–Israeli connection have largely been removed. But, as the American domestic debate over how to befriend Israel constantly reminds us, the terror factor and whatever peace process now exists are echoes of US–Israeli past problems and how the embrace could unravel. A dangerous but subtle proposition has developed that seems to be almost subconsciously accepted by Americans, Arabs and Israelis alike—any serious progress on the peace process will lead to American–Israeli tensions. The proposition is actually highly inaccurate, as demonstrated by the enhancement of US–Israeli relations during the 2005 Israeli unilateral disengagement from Gaza.

Yet in America, many partisans of Israel continue to believe that a robust peace process—however it comes about—would inevitably lead to US–Israeli tension. If the kind of partnership described above were to become a reality, the US–Israeli relationship would rest on firmer ground (and there would be more protection from backsliding into earlier phases). Hence, both Washington and Jerusalem would be more capable of moving in daring and innovative diplomatic directions and more secure in their relationship with each other.

It is ironic, indeed, that the theme of the May 2008 Israeli Presidential Conference was “Facing Tomorrow.” At the May 14 gala celebration of the US–Israeli relationship, it was the performers rather than the speakers who had a better idea of the future of US–Israeli ties, of how to face tomorrow. The two presidents and the prime minister spoke to each other. The dancers, pianists and singers acted in unison. As a model for the US–Israeli relationship, it was they who provided the framework for the next and better phase.