

AIPAC

"Hope and Foreboding:
The Future of the U.S.-Israel Relationship"

by

Thomas A. Dine
Executive Director
American Israel Public Affairs Committee

to the

AIPAC Policy Conference
Washington, D.C.

April 8, 1984

Thank you very much, Bob Asher.

And congratulations to you on your election as President of AIPAC. In your daily display of energy and effectiveness, not just from your base in Chicago but across the country as well, you are the leading exponent of pro-Israel political action. I know that AIPAC will continue to grow in quantity and quality during your presidency.

To you, to our newly elected Officers, Executive Committee and National Council members, I pledge "better-than-ever efforts" on behalf of our common cause -- enhancing and expanding the breadth and depth of the United States-Israel relationship.

Two recent deaths have touched all of us.

Yesterday's passing of Senator Frank Church is a great loss. I worked five years as his legislative assistant for foreign affairs. A conservative at heart, Frank behaved like a liberal. A Senator from an insular state, he performed as a national legislator on war-peace issues, on ecology, on civil liberties. The contradictions in his political career embodied the consensus for Israel that exists today in this country. Almost all dimensions and elements of our citizenry support Israel's security and well-being.

Frank's love was foreign policy. He was not, however, a member of the elitist foreign policy establishment. Indeed, because of his egalitarian nature, because he combined the conservative-liberal philosophies, because he was an avid advocate of peace, he has been the only person since 1948 to

serve as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to champion close U.S.-Israel relations.

We still mourn the death of our former President, my personal friend and political confidante, Mort Silberman. No words can do justice to the meaning of his life. It is in the memory of his ideas and our future acts that we can do him justice. To his memory, I dedicate this speech.

We meet at a significant moment. It is spring in this beautiful city; it is springtime in the U.S.-Israel relationship. The atmosphere is upbeat. We have just experienced a year remarkably free from the kind of acrimony and recriminations which permeated the relationship up through May of 1983. We are achieving an extraordinary number of our legislative objectives, thanks to the 98th Congress -- the most pro-Israel legislature in memory. We are making breakthroughs in fundamental areas, like strategic cooperation and a free trade area, which will strengthen America's positive effects on Israel's security and economy for decades to come. Truly, these are hopeful days.

And yet, there is still in our community a pervasive sense of foreboding. I felt it as I took my morning run along the Potomac River and the tidal basin, surrounded by the bright color of the exquisite cherry blossoms. I felt elated. But I found myself looking toward a dark cloud gathering on the horizon ahead of me. In spite of all we are accomplishing, we all sense that trouble lies ahead, and we may very well be right.

Some of this foreboding is not so much about the situation in Washington, but the one in the Middle East. After 36 years, and five terrible wars, Israel still is not safe.

Just seven days ago, terrorists unleashed bullets and hand grenades into Jerusalem's central business district. From Arab capitals, including Cairo, came praise for this latest dastardly deed. Arafat praised it the loudest.

As we meet, Syria is amassing the largest and most advanced arsenal ever assembled by an Arab confrontation state. Thousands of Soviet advisers are methodically preparing Syrian soldiers for war, teaching them how to use the most sophisticated arms and how to mount and exploit an effective surprise attack.

And beyond Syria, the other Arab states are bringing in a bewildering array of advanced weapons from the most modern production lines in the world. Not only the Soviet Union, but France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and yes, even the United States, are sending to Arab governments at an ever-accelerating rate the finest instruments of death that the human mind can devise for use against Israel and very possibly use against the United States. All this effort and expense, and all these products of human invention, are going into finding ways to spill the blood of Jewish youth, to satisfy the anger and hatred of the Arabs in their relentless war against Israel. It is a very

sobering thought that another war could lie just ahead. This time, as the Iraqis are showing in the Gulf war, mustard gas and nerve gas could be used!

This accelerating arms race in which the Arabs are engaged, creates at the same time a second problem. The Saudis and other financiers can pay for the arms race merely by pumping a few more barrels from a well, enjoying all the while gains in their standard of living that they could not have imagined short years ago. We and other international consumers pay an invisible tax for these arms every time we go to a gasoline station to "fill it up!"

But Israel must pay from the sweat of its brow, running ever faster on the arms race treadmill just to stand still. and I hardly need to remind you all that this is exacting a terrible price, imposing staggering burdens on the economy of the Jewish state. While Japan spends 1% of its GNP on defense, and our own country spends 7%, Israel must devote over 35% of its total production to pay the expense of meeting the Arab threat. Israel, with barely four million citizens, faces a combined Arab army with more tanks and aircraft as all the nations of NATO have on the vast central front in Europe.

Another consequence of the arms race for Israel is runaway inflation. Of course we should not be surprised by this, because inflation is often the handmaiden of wars, as a nation feeds its people and pays for its arms at the same time. Israel, we must remember, has been subjected to an economic war for almost four decades, and the inflation we see is not merely a recent acceleration -- it is the accumulated result. Europe after the First World War and America after the Vietnam War experienced the spiral of inflation. Only in the last three years has America's inflation at last been brought under control. Israel still awaits a post-war era.

Nor is the arms race the only weapon in the Arab war against the Israeli economy. Another weapon is the boycott, denying to Israel many markets in countries that would otherwise be its natural trading partners.

It is important to consider that, for Israel, imports and exports are not just another economic activity, but the very lifeline of its economic existence. Israel is a nation almost barren of natural resources, dependent upon trade to survive. Like Japan, Israel's real product is the hard work and entrepreneurship of its people, who process imported raw materials and export the finished goods. The fact that half the world refuses to buy from Israel has real effects, and it plays no small role in Israel's trade deficit in which Israel is unable to export as much as it must import. The people of Israel are productive. Did you know, for example, that Israelis export more per capita than the Japanese? But the triple whammy -- the arms race, the inflation, and the boycott -- creates a situation in which the support they receive from Diaspora communities and from

the United States Government is essential to enable them to balance the books at all.

And on top of all this, Israel has to cope with the reversal in the peace process that has occurred over the last year. Eleven months ago, Lebanon signed the May 17 agreement with Israel and became the second Arab country to end its conflict with the Jewish state. That non-belligerency accord has now been destroyed by the terrorism and thuggery of the Arab rejectionists. Syria called the Israel-Lebanon agreement "Camp David II." Now it is taking aim at Camp David I.

Far from resisting this assault on peace by the Arab rejectionists, Egypt is bending under the pressure. President Mubarak has plunged the treaty with Israel into a deep freeze. Normalization between Egypt and Israel has been robbed of all meaning. And to add insult to injury, Yasir Arafat is welcomed in Cairo.

Everywhere we look in Israel's neighborhood, the Arab radicals and Islamic fundamentalists are on the march. The so-called Arab "moderates" are quaking in their boots. The extremists are full of passionate conviction. And those Arabs who might otherwise contemplate peace are lacking all resolve.

And even more disturbing for Israel, in this stormy environment, is the specter of isolationism that appears to be growing in this country. Our failure to stand up to terrorist attacks on the Marines, our failure to support a pro-Western government in Beirut, our failure to resist Soviet-backed aggression in Lebanon -- all this is a triumph for the isolationists. And in an election year, neither the incumbent, nor his Democratic rivals are prepared to challenge the dovecoat instincts of Cap Weinberger and the Pentagon.

We Jews know only too well the price of isolationism, because it has been extracted in the blood of our people. But now Israel must face up to the consequences of a neo-isolationism that has already extracted its price in terms of the undermining of American credibility and resolve in the Middle East. This perception of American weakness is bad for the U.S., and bad for Israel.

So, to return to my opening point, perhaps our sense of foreboding has as much to do with the climate in Washington as with the problems facing Israel in the Middle East, which are vivid and very real.

Yet, as Americans, there is a limit to our direct impact on the Middle East. On the other hand, there is a good deal that we can do about the situation here in Washington. In this election year, in particular, we can effect the direction of U.S.-Israel relations. And the strength of that relationship can do much to help Israel forge through the stormy seas ahead.

As we citizens take stock of U.S. policy, there is, as I said at the start, much in which we can find hope and satisfaction.

Let me begin with the economy. While the United States cannot solve all of Israel's economic problems, tangible actions are being taken which will have positive results.

First, the United States Congress is extending to Israel, thanks in no small part to your efforts, one of the most impressive packages of economic aid and security assistance ever achieved.

Doug Bloomfield, AIPAC's legislative director, will review this in some detail on Tuesday morning. But I would like to call to your attention one development of particular significance. In Fiscal Year 1985, for the first time ever, all aid will be provided to Israel on a grant basis, under which no portion will have to be repaid to the United States in the future. This follows a recommendation of the Carlucci Commission on Foreign Economic and Security Assistance, on which I was privileged to serve this past year. And it results from the far-sighted decision of President Reagan to try to help Israel and other aid recipients suffering under the burden of staggering debt, to regain some control over their futures. This bold move does not wipe out Israel's past debt, on which it will pay the U.S. over a billion dollars in debt service this year alone. But at least this move puts a cap on the future growth of that debt. And it gives some hope of getting the balance of payments under control in the future. It is a very fundamental development; it will have helpful effects for many years to come.

A second notable economic policy change, which has still not been achieved, but on which we are making progress, is the establishment of a U.S.-Israel Free Trade Area. This, too, is supported by President Reagan. It will be an arrangement under which almost all Israeli goods could be exported to the United States without being subject to tariffs, and almost all American goods would go to Israel on the same basis. It will be a truly mutual arrangement -- for the benefit of both nations.

Peggy Blair, our new trade specialist, and Ester Kurz, our deputy legislative director, will tell you more about the Free Trade Area tomorrow. But let me point out here this is an economic measure of Olympian proportions. This arrangement will have a tremendous effect in compensating for the fact that Israel is boycotted from many of the world's markets. It will mean that Israel, which already enjoys associate membership in the European Common Market, will have a special economic alliance with the two largest free markets in the world -- that of Western Europe and that of the United States. It is a major legislative issue, and we need your help to get it on track.

Before I leave the good news on the economic policy front, let me mention two more areas of achievement. We are working on

further aid for the Lavi aircraft program, as we did last year, and with your help, I think we can succeed. The Lavi is not just another jet aircraft. It is the backbone of Israel's defense and industrial future, and will be a critical stimulus to Israel's future high technology position. The Lavi is important, and Congress has fully endorsed it.

Equally, we are encouraged by progress in opening up the rules to allow Israeli firms to compete for U.S. government procurement contracts. Here, we ask nothing more than a chance for Israel to compete as America's other allies do, to help complement our defense strength and reduce U.S. defense costs. It would increase the value of Israel's exports and help support its defense industries. It is a sensible idea, and would serve the American national interest.

Turning from economic issues to questions of defense, the most important thing to report is that we are finally making real progress in building a relationship of strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel. When we began to advance this issue two years ago, through our monographs and in many less visible ways, such as lobbying key officials of this Administration, people told us we were whistling in the cemetery, that it would never happen, that opposition was just too strong. Well, as Steve Rosen and Martin Indyk, AIPAC's director and deputy director of Research and Information, will tell you tomorrow morning, the President has embraced the idea, and it is, in fact, moving along pretty well. The opposition is alive and kicking and the battle is not over, but there is already something of a breakthrough in the first step towards building a true military alliance between the United States and its most reliable and effective ally in the Middle East. This, too, is an historic development for which President Reagan deserves credit. It will have positive effects that will be evident for many years to come.

Also in the defense sphere, Congress has succeeded in convincing the President to withdraw his proposal to sell advanced Stinger missiles to Jordan and Saudi Arabia. This does not rule out the possibility that the issue will come up again next year, nor does it go nearly as far as we would like in slowing the flow of Western arms to the Arabs still at war with Israel. But it upholds the principle and postpones the day when Arab states which refuse to make peace with Israel can routinely expect to receive qualitatively superior weapons.

I could go on with these positive developments, but I think the point is clear. It is springtime in the bilateral relationship, and many of the gains that are being made are on issues with long-term policy consequences which could fundamentally transform the U.S.-Israel relationship. With your continued involvement -- and believe me, it is the real reason we are as strong as we are -- I am confident we will continue to make progress on the issues I have identified and others too numerous to mention tonight.

Why, then, as I stated at the outset, do so many of us have a sense of foreboding not only about the situation in the Middle East, but also about the situation in Washington?

We have an intuition that stormy troubles lie just ahead, perhaps as soon as the election is over, no matter who is the winner.

I do not think our unease directly relates to the issues I just discussed, most of which appear to be on course unless swamped by something larger.

Rather, it has to do with the expectation, reported widely in the media, that what is called the "peace process" will resume after the election. This process is expected to focus on King Hussein and resurrect the now dormant package of issues witnessed last year. Whether the next President is Reagan, Mondale or Hart, people have this image of the "peace process" and they expect it to begin again sometime after November 1984. Now this is a peculiar situation. How is it that the pro-Israel coalition, especially the Jewish community, feels such a sense of anxiety at the very mention of resuming this "peace process?"

American Jews are second to nobody -- I mean nobody -- in their desire for peace. Over time we have been the dreamers, the cosmopolitans, the true internationalists. The prophetic words of Micah's fig trees and Isaiah's swords into plowshares concerning peace are our contemporary standard. To all Jews, to achieve real peace in the Middle East would mean that at last Israel would be safe, that the arms race could end, and that the Jewish state could live normally among the nations. Peace is all that Israel asks. And peace, more than anything, is the dream of the pro-Israel community in America.

Yet we have been subjected to so much recent abuse in the name of something purporting to be the "peace process." We thus immediately feel a sense of foreboding when told that this process will begin again in a few months.

How, then, has the noble idea of peace been so corrupted by mistaken practice to produce such a negative reaction in us?

The answer, I submit, is that in the past few years, the real and noble process of making peace that began at Camp David has been put aside, and the term "peace process" has been expropriated as a code word for a different policy that actually consists of tilting toward the Arabs and deliberately provoking tensions with Israel.

In reality this is a conflict process.

I know that I am making a very serious accusation, and to substantiate it, I would like to draw some contrasts between what actually happened at Camp David, and what many of the foreign

policy establishment of officials, experts, and columnists expect the so-called peace process to look like next year.

The Camp David process began when Anwar Sadat announced, at his own initiative, a willingness to sit down with Israel and negotiate problems and differences peaceably. But if we have a so-called peace process next year, it is not expected to begin with King Hussein agreeing to anything. Rather, it would begin with another round of wishful thinking about Hussein by advisers and experts who predictably will assert that if only the United States offers him enough promises and weapons and pledges of pressure against Israel then maybe he will consent to consider a negotiation. This, only after his preconditions are met. So, what is now called the peace process will not begin with the two sides actually sitting down at all. Instead, we will know the process is underway when more arms are proposed for Jordan, or the Administration starts squeezing Israel on settlements, or the United States begins promising the Arabs that they will get their demands in negotiations that have not even begun.

The second stage of next year's so-called peace process will, in this model, occur when the Arabists in Washington look beyond Hussein to the PLO, which they believe has a veto over what Hussein does or does not do and whose permission is therefore required. This step had no counterpart at Camp David, for the simple reason that Sadat knew he could make peace with Israel only by acting on his own -- that a veto given to the radicals would otherwise prevent him from acting.

But in our hypothetical scenario, Arafat would be considered the key, so step two of the "peace process" would be to have more secret U.S. negotiations with the PLO, in violation of our Sinai II commitments to Israel. The purpose would be to hint to Arafat that, if he plays along, he would get some kind of entity in the West Bank. And, since he says he would not even consider it without Jerusalem, we would likely see a promise to him that the Holy City will be negotiable.

Beyond promises to Arafat and Hussein, next year's peace process might very possibly also include some gestures toward Syria and Moscow to gain their permission to let Arafat allow Hussein to negotiate. And when all this is in place the Saudis might then give their permission. This would be innocuously labeled the "comprehensive approach!"

Overall then, before this thing called a peace process ever got off the ground, we would have an entire list of U.S. actions profoundly hostile to Israel and to U.S.-Israel relations. Here is the foreboding scenario:

-- One, the U.S. would again "distance" itself from Israel to prove to the Arabs it could be "evenhanded."

-- Two, the U.S. would tell the world it is ready to

pressure Israel, implying a threat to the lifeline linking Israel to its one real supporter in the world.

-- Three, the U.S. could take some steps to cozy up with the PLO -- a point most advocates of this so-called "peace process" consider particularly essential.

-- Four, before the negotiations even began, the U.S. could promise the Arabs an outcome close to their terms and not Israel's.

-- Five, the U.S. could give some more arms to the Arabs to sweeten them up for the peace process ahead and prove to them that the President can ignore the pro-Israel feelings of Congress and the American people.

-- And six, in all likelihood, even the Syrians and the Soviets might be offered a piece of the action, as the Carter Administration did, to get them to allow the game to be played. Look for headlines that say: "U.S. to play Syrian card!"

When you lay it all out explicitly this way, in a list, the contrast with a true peace process like the one we saw at Camp David is quite clear. And it is equally clear why the very idea of resuming this corrupted version of the peace process is repugnant to people in our coalition, to those who care about the words of Micah and Isaiah, about real peace, and about a healthy relationship between our country and the one democracy in the Middle East.

One foreboding, then, is the product not only of Israel's worsening circumstances, but also of the gathering dark clouds of both isolationism and Arabism in Washington. In the intimacy of our hearts, we fear that the fertility of all our works, exemplified by the flowering cherry blossoms of the burgeoning U.S.-Israel relationship we see before us, will give way once again to destructive tensions and mutual recriminations. It would not be the first time the cherry blossoms have blackened and fallen overnight in a late frost.

Now, perhaps Ronald Reagan, who I firmly believe is a true friend of Israel, has finally seen through this destructive formula that Caspar Weinberger and the Arabists in the bureaucracy repeatedly urge upon him in the name of peace. Maybe Walter Mondale or Gary Hart, should either make it to the Oval Office, will appoint a different set of advisers to nip the whole thing in the bud before it grows into a giant weed again. Very possible our fears are exaggerated, considering the authentic pro-Israel beliefs of all three candidates, and our current Secretary of State.

But what is so troubling is that the seeds of this perverted notion of a peace process can be found throughout the Washington establishment -- among liberals as well as conservatives,

Republicans as well as Democrats. It is written about at the think tanks, broadcast by the press. The approach this represents will be urged upon the next President by many visiting Europeans and Africans, and certainly by the 21 Arab embassies and their State Department desks, as well as by some academics and church leaders. It is the view of the elite and, as it is the most frequently cited view, a busy President could mistake it as a consensus. Some of these advisers who were so involved in last year's episode apparently cannot wait to resume U.S.-Israel tensions behind this facade of a peace process.

Yet, I admit, now that I have brought out into the open what I think are the underlying reasons for our apprehension, a strategy is obvious. It is to look to ourselves, and to use the current period of spring and sunshine to prepare for the possibility of turbulent days to come. We have real strengths, and need not let the storm wash over us without resistance. We have three candidates who rank among the staunchest friends of Israel ever to run for the office of President. At the same time, we have Senatorial and House candidates seeking election and reelection who rank the highest levels of friendship -- and two of them are here with us tonight. We have the support of the majority of the American people. As a result, we have the most pro-Israel Congress on record, and all signs point to further strengthening in November. And, lest we forget, we have an AIPAC which has grown fivefold in membership and morefold in effectiveness in the past few years.

Above all, we have a mobilized pro-Israel community involved in 435 Congressional Districts, more astute and more active than at any time in its history. This, as Arthur Chotin, AIPAC's deputy executive director, emphasized this afternoon and Jackie Abelman, our director of Community Issues, will say more about tomorrow, is the basic means through which the broad support for Israel throughout the United States gets translated into effective political action and policy. So the real solution to our forebodings is not to sit back and wonder what hand fate will deal us, but to intervene and act now; to set the course in history that we want to see. This, above all, is the difference between we who fill this room and others who only watch and wait.

What is to be done?

In essence, we have to use the resources at our command to transform the relationship between the United States and Israel, to make structural changes, to sink down roots that will ensure that the tree of U.S.-Israel relations can withstand any storm generated either in Washington or in the Middle East. We have to work now to ensure that we never again face the crisis that beset U.S.-Israel relations in the cold period of 1982-83.

First, we have to finish building the military and economic alliance between the United States and Israel. As I have already pointed out, this process is under way. Strategic cooperation, all grant aid, and the Free Trade Area -- when they are finally

nailed down -- will indeed transform the relationship. Israel will then come to be seen, not as a supplicant for American handouts, but as a full-fledged alliance partner, helping to promote and defend American interests in this vital but volatile region.

Second, we have to ensure that whoever is in office in January 1985 will return to the real peace process -- the Camp David process -- and will not instead pursue a process predicated on pressuring Israel. This means, above all, persuading policymakers in Washington that a strong and secure relationship with Israel is the very foundation for any progress in solving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Why? Because it robs the Arabs of a viable war option and provides an embattled Israel with the assurances it needs.

Pursuing the Camp David process means insisting that U.S. policy not be based on wishful thinking about Arab intentions, but rather on a clear understanding that it is the Arabs who must first show a willingness to make peace before the United States and Israel can be expected to respond. It means jettisoning once and for all the idea that the PLO could ever be a suitable partner for peace negotiations because its fundamental and unalterable objective is to destroy Israel. In this regard, the 1973 U.S. commitment not to recognize or negotiate with the PLO must be reaffirmed not because we are against talking, but rather because talking with the PLO has manifestly failed to change its attitude toward Israel. It has instead helped legitimize the PLO, eroded Israel's faith in America's commitments, and undermined King Hussein's ability to replace the PLO as a spokesman for the Palestinians who comprise 60% of the King's subjects.

Pursuing a real peace process also means reasserting the principle that Arab states still in a state of confrontation with Israel should not be the recipients of American arms until and unless they agree to make peace with Israel. Arms must come to be viewed by the Arabs as a reward, not an inducement.

And it also means recognizing that some things are not negotiable. Israel's existence is certainly not negotiable, but we must also bring the world to understand that Jerusalem -- as the capital of Israel -- is also not negotiable, let alone handed over to Yassir Arafat to be his capital. That is why this organization and other American Jewish organizations are working diligently to push for legislation that clearly states to all that at least our first branch of government recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital and believes that the U.S. Embassy should be relocated there. As of tonight 221 U.S. Representatives and 40 U.S. Senators publicly agree with us.

Third, we have to defeat the campaign to discredit Israel on the campuses, in the press, and in the elite think tanks and foreign policy houses. We are already fighting back on the campuses as you have heard from Jonathan Kessler this afternoon,

and as you can see in our new monograph, The AIPAC College Guide. This is Mort Silberman's legacy; this is my pledge to his memory and to you that we will successfully educate and train our successors.

And finally, we have to broaden the base of the politically active pro-Israel community. There are a lot of people out there -- a majority of Americans, Protestants and Catholics of all stripes and hues -- who sympathize with Israel, who recognize, as Frank Church did, that Israel embodies the very values that Americans hold so dear. We have to go back to our communities, become more involved, and mobilize if we are to complete the tasks we have undertaken.

We have come a long way. The state of AIPAC is very good. But we still have a long way to go before we relax. The history of our people has taught us that we can never afford to be complacent, that the good times must only serve as a preparatory period for the bad times to come. If we act now, we may yet succeed in avoiding those bad times. But if they come, with your help we will be ready.