

Israel Today and Tomorrow - Monday PM Panel
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**Participants - Michael Oren, Ruth Gavison, Leon Wieseltier,
Natan Sharansky**
Moderator - David Horowitz

Moderator: Thank you; thank you very much for all the introductions. Wow; there's a lot of you out there. I have to say just on a personal note and I'm sure I speak for the majority Israeli panel here, I flew in from Israel today and it is just astounding to--to come here and feel sort of enveloped in your vast numbers by all this energy and--and this passionate commitment to Israel's well-being. It's just a privilege to be here. Okay; we're--we're going to try and sort of cover the whole of human history in--in 20 minutes, so let's--let's start. And I want to start at the very beginning so to speak with a reminder of what we set out to achieve with this precious hard-won, small revived Jewish State.

Sixty years ago in Israel's Declaration of Independence, we proclaimed ourselves and I quote *open for Jewish immigration and for the--and the gathering of exiles*. We promised that Israel, quoting again *will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisioned by the Prophets of Israel. It will insure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex. It will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture*. And we and Israel we further declared 60 years ago to *extend our hand to all neighboring States and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land*. So my esteemed panelists 60 years later, how is Israel doing? Has Israel achieved those laudable aims? Has Israel achieved the dream? Where is Israel succeeding? Where is Israel failing? Michael, maybe start with you with a historian's perspective.

Michael Oren: David, thank you.

Moderator: A little question to get going with.

Michael Oren: A little question; thank you all. Good evening everyone; I'm deeply honored to be back again with AIPAC. Let me

answer the question first as--as a historian and then secondly as an Israeli. As a historian I can only assure you that the story of the creation and the survival of the state of Israel is one of the unique stories in human history, perhaps the most extraordinary story in human history. Think about this; this is a story of a people that returns to its ancestral Biblical homeland after 2,000 years of exile having survived enumerable expulsions, massacres, the greatest single incident of--of mass murder in human history that comes back to this homeland and creates a modern, vibrant society and advanced economy, a tumultuous but resilient democracy, science, a flourishing Hebrew culture, an Army that survives and prevails throughout successive attempts to destroy, where in human history is there a story like this--really extraordinary?

As an Israeli I'm always mindful of the--the great axiom of Theodore Herzl, *if you will it, it is no dream*. Every time I hear that maxim I'm reminded of a--a corollary by the English poet William Butler Yeats. *In dreams* Yeats wrote *begin responsibilities* and as Israelis having dreamt this dream and realized the dream we incur immense responsibilities. We have a responsibility to insure that the villages and towns along our borders are defended against Kasam and Katyusha rocket fire.

We have a responsibility that our government accords to the norms of Jewish and democratic values. We have a responsibility to open our society to the non-Jewish minorities within it but also the ultra-Orthodox section of the societies all the while demanding loyalty and service from those sections.

And we have a responsibility to seek peace with our neighbors. We've done so successfully with some of our neighbors; there's much left to be done. We have that responsibility all the while maintaining our demographic and democratic integrity as a Jewish state and insuring that our Capital, Jerusalem, remains the internal and internationally recognized capital of the Jewish state.

Moderator: Natan I want to come to you next and I--I can just tell you I remember when you--when you came to Israel and it was five minutes ago--it was 22 years ago. So that means you've been in Israel for more than a third of our modern existence. How--how is the reality reconciled with--with the way it should be, with the way you expected it to be?

Natan Sharansky: Well for me coming to Israel was a very powerful day because it started from--okay, KGB prison and it finished in the Old City with all the people and my wife. So it was a direct way from hell to paradise. And it really--from darkness to light and I felt then

the time in paradise and when you are in the heavens you can only go down. For 22 years I go down and I'm still in paradise; that's how I feel.

Now I have to say of course I will not even start arguing with our great historians. Of course the ideals of Israel as was declared in the Declaration of Independence is an astounding success--astounding--unbelievable success and I will add to those things which Michael said, I will add one more; it gave to every Jew in the world, whatever his relations with the religion or tradition, the feeling that he has a very firm base for his identity. And it gave to every Jew in the most difficult situation self-respect and hope and that's extremely important--extremely important. Where it failed, the idea of creating normal States I think it's a very strange idea; you take chosen people, you put them in the Holy Land and you get normal State. That idea which failed and it had to fail; okay.

Moderator: Okay, all right; Leon let me--let me come to you next and you've--you're just back from Jerusalem so the--the reality of Israel very fresh in your mind?

Leon Wieseltier: I think the deepest discovery or commitment of Zionism even before it was a commitment to Jewish sovereignty or to a Jewish state was a commitment to the return of Jewish historical agency. The Jews decided that they would take their fate into their own hands. Now you can analyze the successes and the failures of Israel and I'm one of those people who thinks that by the laws of nations Israel is a spectacular success, you can analyze that in terms of the complicated but inevitable human fact that some aspects of Israel's destiny, of Jewish destiny are things that Jews and Israelis can control and others are not--and others are not. You know in times of Revolution as a dear friend of mine once said to me about the years right before the fall of Communism in the late '80s, in certain times--he said to me, you cannot believe--unless you believe that everything is possible nothing is possible. And so there was a time in the early years in Israel where there was an inevitable and very beautiful belief in the possibility of total transformation and a kind of utopian mentality. Utopian mentalities are--they're traps; they're traps. There's no need--there's no need for them. I think that in those areas in--of Israeli life in which Israel is in fact the sole master of its fate it has in some ways performed brilliantly and--and that--that is to say if--if the dream is retired that is in part because Israel is no longer just a dream and no longer just an ideological experiment of some kind. It is an actually existing society of enormous vitality. But as I say there are aspects of Israeli fate and of Jewish fate that are not entirely in our

hands, and they have to do with relations to other States or other peoples or other powers and there you know the situation is complicated as we know, but the absence of peace does not by my light constitute a failure of Zionism. And I'm one of those Jews for whom Zionism remains a very beautiful word--even though I have my own interpretations of it. But--well etcetera--etcetera.

Moderator: I want to come back to the issue of--of all fate in your hands in a second but--but first with I want you to weigh in as the--certainly the most Israeli member of this panel, born in Jerusalem and before there was a state of Israel. I won't be more specific than that--a Palestinian; we should have kept that name, tenth generation background, so--give--give us your sense of--of how well we're doing and the--and the challenges we face.

Ruth Gavison: I think one of the reasons we are sitting here today in such large numbers is that the fact that 60 years ago the state of Israel was founded--is on the one hand, still moving; a lot of what we hoped for and promised was indeed achieved. And ideals in any event are not something that you achieve; it's an aspiration. It's something towards which you always are aiming. So that would be fine. I think one of the more troubling aspects of our sitting here today in such large numbers is that I think in the past after say 10 or 20 years of Israel's existence the feeling was that the fact of Israel as a Jewish state was accepted and recognized and there to say. So Israelis were starting to struggle in order to make Israel more just, more free, more equal, more representative, and I think one of the things that we have learned is that Israel is still one of the only countries if not the only country in the world whose rights to exist is questioned by many. And I think this is something that can come to be a disappointment and as a troubling fact that it can be the case that despite the fact that Israel has existed for 60 years and that some of its achievements are so immense that it's still possible from the outside and from within the state itself to doubt its legitimacy and its right to exist. And I think one of our challenges in the 60 years ahead is to understand why this is happening and to try and work both within and in the relationships between Israel and the world and I'm sure we'll return to these subjects in our conversation--how to make sure that the dream of Israel is not only something that was achieved; it's something that's going to be enduring and is going to fulfill its basic purposes of letting the Jewish people have a place where it has political independence instead of domination.

Moderator: Absolutely; I want to pick up on--on something that you started to talk about Leon and--and Ruth you're relating to that as well. I want to quote something else to you now; you were at--Leon you spoke at Shimon Peres's *Facing Tomorrow Conference* just a few weeks ago.

Leon Wieseltier: I did; yes.

Moderator: He characterized the history of the Jewish people as oscillating between acceptance and rebellion, between the tragedy of a helpless people at the mercy of a cruel fate and the resurgence of that people to take control of its fate and shape for its self--the tomorrow it once only dreamt about. So that's how President Perez put it--oscillating between helplessness at the mercy of others and being able to shape our own fate. Well where is Israel today on that continuum and I ask you--maybe start with you, Leon, especially in the light of the Islamic extremist threat you spoke about forces that--that are beyond our control, the--the forces emblemized by Iran that threaten Israel; where are we on that helpless to--to able to take care of our own fate continuum?

Leon Wieseltier: You know for Jews and certainly for Israelis sometimes it's very hard to know where the philosophy of history stops and threat assessment begins. And just as it's important not to exaggerate--to make the terrible mistake of exaggerating the extent of Israeli mastery over its fate I think it's equally important not to exaggerate the sense of helplessness. And I say this not just because of the awesome military might of Israel vis-à-vis various enemies; but--but also because there are--Israel cannot afford to sit still simply content with itself and confirmed in its own sense of the rightness of its cause. It must and indeed it seems always to be charged to seek imaginative partial solutions, provisional solution steps forward; my own analysis is that right now we'll put the Iranian problem aside in part because it seems to be all that anybody has spoken about and my own analysis is that right now Israeli peace is being held hostage to a savage Palestinian civil war and I think that whereas Israel can affect the outcome of this civil war at the margins, it fundamentally cannot determine its outcome, and that Israel is simply in some sense waiting if you will for the Palestinians to decide what in the world they will become and when they will finally agree to take this state that the whole world has been trying to give them for 60 years.

However--however that does not mean--that does not mean that Israel should not constantly in very practical pragmatic ways be doing whatever it can not just to secure the safety of its citizens in a grand

historical settlement but actually to see what is possible to make life in Sderot more normal and--and life in Kiryat Shmona more normal, life in Mahane Yehuda more normal and so on and this as I say involves not grand theoretical things but practical imaginative engagement that you know--the--the search for openings, the search for openings.

Moderator: Natan?

Natan Sharansky: Well I think that the fate of Israel is very similar to the fate of Jews. We Jewish people being the other in Western civilization always got the challenge, the question to what extent we have to adjust ourselves to the world in order to be comfortable and at the same time to remain ourselves. And as long as this adjustment meant that we had to find some practical ways of co-existence inside Israel it was okay. The moment we were thinking that the best way to be accepted is to give up on the identity then there was disappearance of Jewish people through assimilation. Of course I agree that we have to take into account the forces of the world and the standards of a physical small state have limited means to guarantee all this but what the world more and more expects from us including big parts of the world that we will stop being a Jewish State. And that's something that we cannot give up on this; that's something that --the only way how we can influence on the world for the better is to insist on our right to be a Jewish State, what it means to have very deep inside ourselves the value of—persons created in the image of God but also the person who has a purpose in this world--to be alive to the nation, first of all through your own life. And then and as a result to expect that support in the ideas of freedom also among our neighbors, you can improve their life too but God forbid--not now that we are in the middle of these three difficult wars--small island of freedom against dictators, small non-Muslim island against fundamentalists and Jewish national state at the time when the free world becomes more and more post-national, anti-national; if we really want to be in peace with the world and to remain ourselves and have good contributions with others we have to insist on being a Jewish state in spite of all the pressures.

Moderator: Yeah; Michael, do you--?

Michael Oren: Can I comment on this?

Moderator: Yeah; please and--and maybe--are--are we being cowed by that international climate? Are we--is there more that we could do to assert the--the importance of Jewish values and--and to sort of assert our Jewish sovereign strengths, more strengths and try to

impress upon--impress them upon our neighbors? Are--are we worrying about own legitimacy and is that constricting our behavior?

Michael Oren: Much can be done David of course to--to sure up Israel's image in the world but I think it--the main task begins at home. It--maintaining a sense of historical context; you know the--it's very rare in the annals of history that a nation faces a truly existential challenge and usually when there is an existential threat it's a source of great upheaval in that society. Israelis face a multiplicity of existential threats on a daily basis from a nuclear(izing) Iran, from terrorist rocket attacks that render large swaths of Israel uninhabitable and sometimes it--it--that--that sense of overwhelming threat can generate a deep self-doubt and it's very important that Israelis maintain a sense of historical perspective. Look back at Israel 60 years ago--1948; 600,000 Jews in a country that had no economy, no international allies that was being invaded by six Arab Armies that were exquisitely armed with tanks and planes and we had basically small arms and we prevailed. Look back at June 1967; a million Arab soldiers massed on Israel's borders, a collapsing economy, no international allies, a hostile Soviet Union, a hostile China, a hostile India, and look at Israel in 2008--Israel in 2008 with a thriving economy, Israel with excellent relations with 1.3 billion Chinese, 800,000 Indians, with great relations with the former Soviet block, many of the Soviet block countries and a historic alliance with the United States which is unrivaled really in the post-War, World War II history of the United States in its intensity, its firmness and--and multi-dimensional. It's an extraordinary historical context and it's very important we maintain this. Yes; Israel faces existential threats. And yet we have surmounted similar threats of similar magnitude in the past and it's very important they remember not just our own history; they remember 3,000 years of Jewish history because Jews have excelled at confronting and surmounting existential threats for a great long time. And it is something that informs and imbues the Jewish state with that resilience and faith.

Moderator: Leon do you want to comment on that?

Leon Wieseltier: No; I wanted to say that--I wanted to amplify something that my friend, Natan said. I think he's correct about the act--the absolute essential imperative to maintain the Jewish(ness) of the state and to keep this as a form of inner-strength and not just outer relations but I do want to say that there has been an ominous development in the past few years and that has been the rehabilitation of the idea of the one-state solution. Intellectually and also politically

diplomatically something has changed and there's an irony here. Those of you have been at AIPAC for a long time and who have been involved in the Jewish debates, the internecine debates about Israeli policy over recent decades--well we should not that in the decades in which we have been arguing among ourselves about whether or not there should be a Palestinian state or not a Palestinian state more Palestinians, more Western intellectuals, some Western governments and so on have actually begun to give up on the idea of the two-state solution. Now the one-state solution is no solution for Israel; the one-state solution represents the end of the Jewish State. And when people talk about one--the one-state solution or a bi-national state they are speaking about greater Palestine; that is what that means. Now what it means for Jews is that whatever the bitterness of our debates in recent decades, about the territorial compromise, land for peace--all of these things that we know the fact is by my lights, [*Hebrew*], the fact is that unless one day the state of Palestine will be created it will be almost impossible to meet the ideal to realize the standard that Natan is talking about. And we have to understand that regardless of the fact that there is no partner or half a partner and there isn't anything to talk about now and so on we have to keep our focus clear, we have to understand what our historical and moral strategy has to be, and we have to--I say we--I should--and Israel must not do anything--anything to foreclose the possibility of the only possible--. I mean this partitioned--remember.

Natan Sharansky: With--with one correction; I'm sorry. With all our desire--with all our desire to avoid a one-state solution we cannot impose on Palestinians to have States near us and if there is not a one--today many of us would say that there is not one Palestinian leader who thinks in terms of two-state solutions and they all think in terms of sooner or later there will be a one-state solution. We cannot make this decision for them.

Moderator: I would just--I mean I think you're--you're pushing at an open door and preaching to the choir etcetera Leon and this audience I think is utterly sophisticated and--and understands that--that a one-state solution is--is the end of the--the Jewish sovereignty and is unthinkable.

Leon Wieseltier: But that's where we are now.

Moderator: But at the same time there's--of course there's been a shift in Israel in the generation that--that in the last generation which--which produced a consensus that if we can find a way to separate

from the Palestinians that's--that's an imperative for us. But an--an imperative which is contextualized by the difficulties of reach an--an accommodation with the Palestinians; yes, Ruth?

Ruth Gavison: I would like to rest this question because I think that it--seeing it developed is really the key. No individual is ever in total control of his life and I think no individual should think that they don't have any control over their lives. And this is the same for States, especially for small States; so I don't think that the country--where we are on the continuum is a very interesting question.

I think it is critical that Israel identifies what are its critical goals and it will take control over what it can do towards achieving these goals. And I think Israel is not always doing that at the moment and I think this kind of debate is an indication of how Israel is failing in identifying what is critical for its existence as a Jewish state and failing to do the kinds of things that are required so that it will be able to continue to control its fate in a state that will give independence for Jews. And I think that a one-state and a two-state solution--

Moderator: So you should be a little bit more specific Ruth.

Ruth Gavison: --is a good example because we said that one of the main things that we didn't achieve from the Declaration of Independence is peace and the problem with peace is that there is a big argument about who is responsible for the fact that there is no peace between Israelis and Arabs? Some people think it's only the Jews who are responsible. Some people think that it's only the Arabs; some people think it's both of them. I think at this stage it's not that important because the problem is that if Israel says as some leaders are saying that Israel must have peace and a Palestinian state this is a very bad message for the region because if you--if Israel must have an agreement then its enemies will not give it an agreement.

And I think what Israel must say to itself as difficult as it is--is that yes; Israel wants peace. Israel is willing to pay a heavy price for peace. Israel has a strategic interest in peace in the Palestinian state in the two-state solution but if there is no peace forthcoming, Israel will do what it takes to remain a Jewish state for as long as it takes because the Jewishness of Israel is the meaning in which the state of Israel is enabling Jews for the first time in many years to take control over all aspects of their lives and to decide questions not only individually as Jews, not only to maintain their own lives as Jews and create Jewish culture, but to create a Jewish life that has a political aspect, not to be just tolerated and even welcomed into a country where others are forming the majority and Jews are important but

nonetheless a minority, to have one place where Jewish people and Hebrew culture is the majority culture. This is the meaning of the Jewishness of Israel.

Moderator: Okay; we can stop there right? That's--that's great and I'm glad to--to hear how keenly you identified with those comments. Natan I want to come back to something that--that you mentioned about.

Natan Sharansky: Why we Israelis so easily agree on everything in Washington? Why we can't agree on everything in Jerusalem?

Moderator: Because AIPAC hopefully assembled a panel of, you know such--such mutual empathy. You spoke about the light unto the nations and--and the--the high morals of Judaism. And I personally worry very deeply that we're in such a ruthless region where our enemies are prepared to do such terrible things to their own people, are we able in this region to maintain the high Jewish morals that we want to--that are integral to our--our identity and survive in this region? Natan--start with you?

Natan Sharansky: Well I believe we have no choice; we have to do it and we are doing it. I--I was--for many years I was in the Security Cabinet and I was involved in making decisions which I'm sure no country in the world with all respect to AIPAC but even in the United States of America they're not doing such decisions. They're not making decisions not to use artillery and tanks but to send soldiers from house to house knowing that many of our soldiers will be killed in order to save--to--to limit victims among Palestinians. Those are the decisions which we are making and continue to make and look what are the decisions that were made by not--in Yugoslavia, by America--Afghanistan and Iraq and you'll see that Israel is keeping much higher standards in this challenge between need to--to fight the war and to be human. But people are saying incorrectly we're not getting any credit for it. Not only we're not getting any credit for it--for this; we're attacked--they're organizing national courts; we have more criminals just at the time when we're doing these efforts. And I'm saying we have no choice; we have to stick to our truth, to stand on this, to have this different standards--we are against double standards. We have four special standards for the state of Israel but only we want the world to recognize that we are--have high standards and tell the world and they'll accept it--exactly as it was with the Jews when the world then understands that our struggle is their struggle. It takes time but when the time the world understands and many people do not;

American leaders already understand. In Europe it takes time but they start understanding now that our struggle with our very special high standards but there's a constant struggle against terror. It's the fight for their own interest and we have nothing to do--we have to stick to this; we have to fight against the hypocrisy of the free world and against cruelty of our neighbors.

Moderator: I just want to elaborate on--on--it is astoundingly ironic that we are so restrained. I was told; I interviewed the--the Commander of the Air Force two years ago who told me about footage that the Air Force has of Kasam crews out to fire and taking kids with them and they take kids with them because they--they know that Israel won't--won't fire on them because we don't--we don't want to kill civilians--even civilians who have been taken into a combat zone. And so on the one hand we are holding to these astounding standards and on the other hand we are being castigated in--in much of the world and regarded with ambivalence in other parts. I don't know, Leon; maybe you want to explain that--or what we can do to try and--and shape that international perception?

Leon Wieseltier: I--I mean I agree with everything that Natan said. I'm temperamentally a little bit less inclined to self-congratulation but I want to say that I don't believe in the innocence of Israel. I believe in the goodness of Israel. I think that there is a very important distinction to be made between innocence and goodness. I don't believe that state especially power--powerful states, especially states who are fighting for their survival are going to be innocent always and I have no expectation or desire of Israel to be innocent. I think that's a childish aspiration.

What I do--what I do hope for and what I do see is that one can--one can defend the goodness which is always a relative term when it comes to such things, when it comes to the question of state power and its uses. I do believe that by the standards of other nations, by the standards of the history of state power and its uses, Israel has acquitted itself pretty remarkably and as long as we can speak of Israel's goodness I think it would be best for many reasons to abandon any fantasies of Israel--of Israel's innocence. Defending Israel's existence is a very harsh thing to do and the harshness has been imposed upon Israel but it is nonetheless a very harsh thing to do and it is important that we analyze that harshness morally in--in the proper way.

Michael Oren: Yeah; but having said that Leon, I think it's important to remember yet recent history. Israel certainly between the years

2000 and 2005 was subjected to relentless suicide bombing and Israel became the first democracy in history to prevail over terror and we did it without devastating the other side. What would have happened if suicide bombings had been incurring in Phoenix, Arizona or in Paris or certainly in Moscow? How would these countries have reacted? We never carpet bombed Hebron and we never carpet bombed Tulkarm or Jenin. It's an extraordinary historical achievement also in moral and Jewish terms--not just in pure tactical terms and I think it is--the business of defending Israel is dirty difficult business but throughout it all we have accorded with a standard of morality which is unparalleled in modern history.

Moderator: All right; so--so that would suggest that--that Natan that your point is valid that there is a means to protect ourselves and yet hold to our ambitious Jewish moral values but--but now you see, first of all, you see different tactics being employed. It won't be so easy to put a physical barrier against ever extended ranges of rockets and missiles and even as we have tried to act well, we are buffeted and battered internationally. We are de-legitimized even to the point of our right to exist being questioned because we are so quote unquote *disproportionately aggressive*. And so how do we--how do we grapple with that; yes, Natan?

Natan Sharansky: Here we are coming to the important role of AIPAC and I'll tell you why. We--take Jenin operation and I meant the Jenin operation when I spoke about extremely noble decisions which were taken. Really it has to be started—shows how, the state, the middle of the War against Terror is making decisions which in advance they know more of our soldiers will be killed in order to save.

Moderator: Let's just put this into context; you're talking about Operation Defensive Shield?

Natan Sharansky: Operation Defensive Shield in 2002--

Moderator: When Israel goes in Jenin refugee camps?

Natan Sharansky: When there was a wave of suicide bombings, when in one month 150 Israelis were killed; when 30 Israelis were killed, as I said when we--after 12 hours of debate decided that we are sending troops in those towns from which they came and this--this decision was made not to use their--when they were coming to the camps from which more terrorists--suicide bombers came then from all over the world--that we are not using any heavy weapons, but our

soldiers go from house to house and then specifically this small refugee camp of Jenin, 20--52 of our soldiers were killed, 55 terrorists were killed and--and we were accused in the ethnic cleansing--more or less. Then I travel all over the campuses in America in those days and they see films Jenin, Jenin--about awful tragedy, about unusual cruelty of the Israeli Army and so many students who believe in human rights who are very human who want to be good, who want to do on the good of the world are complaining--participating in the campaign to complain against Israel together with the Muslim extremists and many Jewish students are absolutely lost. They are shamed; they say we don't want the state of Israel to exist. I heard it myself because it creates a problem for us. And at the same very time I could see how when on this campus 20, 30, 40, 50 Jews and non-Jews will stand up and will study the situation; they know the facts, they know the truth and they can change the situation. And it is difficult to go against the stream. That's what we Jews were doing all our history--going against the stream or assimilating--it is very difficult but it can be done and the results are very powerful. And that's exactly where AIPAC is so important.

Moderator: The--the operative conclusion being therefore that we also need an international AIPAC right? You've got to spread your wings; yes, Ruth?

Ruth Gavison: I want to make this a bit more complicated because I think we are making our life a bit too easy here.

Moderator: Heaven forbid; yes.

Ruth Gavison: I agree that there is a double standard against Israel and Israel has taken to criteria of excellence that no other state is taken to and this is a serious problem. But I also think that we are facing a new different--a new type of warfare; it's a warfare that is symmetrical. It's--we're not the only country in the world who is facing this kind of problem and we need to be a bit more creative in finding responses to this challenge. The fact that for many years our southern region and for the Lebanon War the northern region were subjected to heavy rocketing without adequate military response by Israel when Israel did not want to restrain its force, suggested there is a general problem here, a strategic problem here that is not a problem of international criticism or anything else. And I think again I want to return to the fact that some of the critical voices against Israel are not only from Palestinian propaganda, which is serious; some of these voices are from within the Jewish community here and from within the

Jewish community within Israel itself, from people serving in the Army and complaining about the moral standard of the Israeli Army.

Now this is not only a moral issue; this in itself is a strategic issue because if Israelis are not sure that their war is just and it's conducted justly this is going to create weaknesses within Israel and definitely this is going to correlate to how the world thinks of Israel in the way that is very critical. So I think that we need to face two facts; (a) it's true that there is double standards in world opinion which means that Israel should not seek to please world opinion; but it does not mean that there are no moral constraints on the way Israel should and must wage war. And it does not mean that there are not moral constraints on the way Israeli soldiers are allowed to conduct themselves in frustration over you know when their comrades are killed. It's extremely difficult but since this is not a one-goal thing; it's not like September 11th. It's day in and day out for years; it's critical for Israel to maintain a position that is complex, no to world hypocrisy, no to political correctness, no to Palestinian propaganda, but no to Israeli self-righteousness, no to Israeli willingness to not look at the cases where some Israelis are behaving cruelly without justification with no strategic advantage just because they're frustrated and need to vent their anger. Both of these things are dangerous and it's not a matter of not backing soldiers in difficult circumstances; it's not that. The idea is that feeling that your cause is just and you're doing what is just including sometimes hurting civilians if it's necessary to defend yourself including that--this is something that is critical for the ability of Israel to sustain this kind of war for a long time. And we're going in for the long haul. It's not going to be over tomorrow.

Moderator: Michael, I think you want to respond to that but I--I--so respond briefly and then I want to move on.

Michael Oren: I would just say among the yes(es) Ruth; yes to Zionism.

Ruth Gavison: Oh yes.

Michael Oren: Yes to Zionism; one of the--one of the fundamental assumptions of Zionism that we have re-gathered in our ancient homeland in order to be safe where Jewish blood will not be shed cheaply and the--the state of Israel has a responsibility to its citizens which is even greater than the responsibility to reduce civilian casualties on the other side.

Ruth Gavison: I accept.

Michael Oren: And that they should--the citizens of the state of Israel should not be subjected to relentless--relentless rocket fire with impunity on the other side. And I agree with you about the creative solution; not every solutions means sending the Israeli Army into Gaza. I for one again as an Israeli and not as a historian cannot understand why the political leaders of Hamas can wander free on the streets of--of Gaza while the citizens of Sderot hunker down in bomb shelters.

Moderator: I do want to move on Michael and I want to turn to the--to the real appropriate bailiwick for--for an AIPAC event which is to talk a little bit about the American Israeli relationship and--and start with you, Michael. How important has it been that partnership for the past 60 years and how vital is it going to be in the--in the coming decades?

Michael Oren: Well the Israeli American relationship has evolved over the last 60 years. America was not an ally of the state of Israel, certainly not until after the Six-Day War when the United States American leaders woke up to the fact that here was a--a regional powerhouse that could be an important asset to the United States in the Cold War and from that point on from the late 1960s through 1970s this relationship evolved to the point today where and I--I think I mentioned this earlier, but I'll reiterate that the US Israel relationship today is the firmest and most multi-faceted alliance which the United States has with any country in its post-World War II history. And it's happening on so many different levels. It's of course on the strategic level in--in cooperation in the War against Terror, intelligence sharing; it's happening on the level of training on both sides of both Armed Forces. I recently was honored by being flown out from Israel to the USS Truman out in the middle of the Mediterranean in honor of Israel's 60th anniversary. The--the USS Truman held a celebration onboard; it was extraordinary. It's happening on the level of economic cooperation where Israel now is the second most represented country on the NASDAQ Exchange; it's happening in student exchanges. My--my wife works for Birthright and they're now bringing 180--180,000 students from --from Israel and the United States to the state of Israel. But I think that the true basis and this is something I--I referred to in my speech last year is--is a spiritual and ideological affinity which is really unparalleled in America's foreign policy. It's the--it's the great connection to--between this democracy and the oldest and most resilient democracy in the Middle East. It's the connection between an America which grows--grows out of a puritan tradition in which there

was engrained support for the notion of a recreated Jewish State, indeed the idea of America was indistinguishable from the idea of a re-created Jewish state and that's why John Adams and Abraham Lincoln and Woodrow Wilson were what we would call today--Zionists. That relationship will remain exceedingly important for both the United States and Israel in the future. The United States is our ally--not just militarily, not just economically but of all--above all diplomatically, standing beside us in the UN, standing with us in the search for peace. I really don't see any major change in the future. David, it's--it's really; it's a remarkable relationship.

Moderator: Leon do you agree with that, you're as confident?

Leon Wieseltier: Yeah; I do. I--I think that the existence--the survival of Israel is almost unimaginable without the alliance with the United States. I think that the alliance remains based upon shared values. I think the moral foundation of it is finally the strongest. I think I would complicate Michael's remarks only in this way; I think it's important for people to--here to understand the full complexity of America's strategic needs in the region especially since the Iraq War. It--there is nothing that would please the United States more and serve American and Israeli interests more than the establishment of what certain experts like to call a Pax-Americana. There are many things standing in the way of this regional arrangement; one of them is the Israeli Palestinian conflict. The United States has always--is always--always has and always will find itself thwarted in its strategic ambitions for the region by this conflict between what it would like to regard as an internecine conflict within the American orbit, within the American sphere of influence. And I think that it's important to recognize for that reason that whatever any Democrat or Republican candidate or President says there will be a peace a process--it will not be a peace process that will please all of Israel's supporters. The United States has very strong strategic reasons for needing such a peace process and the unpleasantness is that this--it may be pleasant as well, though it's more likely that we'll see unpleasantness first, has to be understood as part of the larger strategic picture.

Moderator: Natan?

Nathan Sharansky: I think it's a little bit dangerous to wield or to explain all the special relations between Israel and the America on the special political arrangements of this or another period because who knows what will be the--the strategical interest in five years. If oil will be so expensive maybe--much better strategic interest to strengthen

relations with Saudi or with Iran. I think--well we all agree that there are mutual values and when we ask what mutual values--freedom. But England also cherishes freedom and France cherishes freedom. What is so special about American and Israel relations? America and Israel are two most religious countries of the free world, --most religious, people sometimes don't realize it but on Saturday all the synagogues in Israel are full; on Sunday all the churches in America are full; in Europe all the churches and all the synagogues are empty--absolutely. Only mosques are full in Europe.

So Israel and America are countries which are unabashedly patriotic, so in Israel and America patriotism, faith, and freedom go together. They have a strong alliance. And that's not what is happening in other parts of the world. From this world in our future confrontations with fundamentalism, this union between freedom and identity is extremely important and that's why this union between America and Israel is so natural and so deep and I have no doubt that in 60 years from now it will be as important as it is today.

Moderator: Lovely; let's--let's go--and now I'm going to give you an impossible final question each which is to flash forward 60 years and answer the questions that you should never answer and--and give us a sense of--of how you think Israel will be 60 years from now in about 30-seconds each, okay? So now that I've given you 10-seconds to absorb the impact of that impossible question, Michael let's start with you. Israel 60 years from today--we should all live so long--?

Michael Oren: One of the great things about being a historian David is that you only have to predict the past. First of all, we'll all be driving electric cars. Israel will--and I agree thoroughly with Natan that Israel will have an even stronger relationship with the United States and that Israel will continue to develop its society, that Israel will continue to preserve its relationship with diaspora Jewry and Israel will bark on a great process of introspection, which we haven't really talked sufficiently about this--this evening but the great challenge of Israel in the next 60 years after we have built the state institutions, after we built our Armies, after we've established our diplomacy is figuring out who we are as a nation, our relationship to Judaism whether we're just a state of Jews or is there something inherently Jewish about this State, our relationship with our minority communities which is exceedingly important; we're going to embark on this great venture of self-discovery and at the end of 60 years I think we'll have a good sense of what Israel is and is about.

Moderator: Ruth, Israel 60 years from now?

Ruth Gavison: Well I--I won't sound an unpleasant note; I hope that Israel will be independent and Jewish and liberal 60 years from now. I don't take this for granted and I'm going to try and work as hard as I can and make anyone else who is concerned about this fact work as hard as they can so that Israel in 60 years will be and we will be here sitting and talking about Israel and its prospects for the next 60 and 100 years. And I would like you all to go with this feeling that there is nothing more dangerous to a project like Israel from taking it for granted. I think this is part of the reason that some of the strengths that Israel has that enabled it to overcome much greater difficulties than--that it faced 60 and 70 and 80 years ago and it did it admirably. Some of these features are not as strong today as they were and this is something that is troubling. Some of the concerns of the Jewish people with Israel and with the continuation of the Jewish people is not as strong today as it was 60 years ago. And these are things that each one of us who is interested in the survival and flourishing of the Jewish people and of the state of Israel as the independent home of part of the Jewish people and in the relationships between Israel and America should work very hard to maintain and promote this relationship.

Moderator: Leon?

Leon Wieseltier: Well the immediate funny answer would be that 60 years from now Shimon Peres will still be seeking high office. But more substantively I have to say that--that whereas I have an almost mystical faith in the survival of Israel I do find myself deeply anxious about the future, somewhat along the lines that Ruth has mentioned. For the first time in ever really--in my adult life I sometimes think that there will not be peace in my lifetime. On the other hand, if one looks at what the demographers say about--about population growth between the river and the sea, if one looks at various other things that we've talked about the--the--the arrival of peace seems to me to be more urgent than ever before. I worry more when it comes to the--the larger Jewish questions even though of course the hostility between the secular and the religious is quite sickening--I actually worry much about the American Jewish community than I do about Israel, about which I have grave doubts. But--but I will say that I do think Ruth is right; one cannot take it for granted. Peace has never been more necessary and for the reasons we've all said peace has also never been more distant in some way.

Moderator: Yeah; I mean I--I don't think--I don't think there's a dangerous tendency in any of worlds to take Israel for granted and I

think there's a recognition that our inability to--to reach an accommodation because of the Islamist imperative now is not only an Israeli incredible challenge; this is--this is a challenge that's--that the free world is grappling with. We're--we're just on the frontline of it. Natan, the last word to you, please.

Natan Sharansky: Well the important thing that in 60 years from now--in fact much earlier, but definitely 60 years from now by far the majority of Jewish people will live in Israel. And I recommend to everybody to think how many of your great-grandchildren will be in Israel, how many of them will live as Jews in diaspora, and how many of them will assimilate? It's a very important question to think about. Second, what--the state of Israel by its creation may have many good things but a problematic thing which was created--fence between Israeli and Jew; this fence already now starts being brought down and it's very important that it will be brought down. I believe that in 60 years from now it will not exist. There will be a bond--Jewish Israeli identity and the Jews--from this point Jews in diaspora, for them Israel will be a very important part of their identity and the Israelis will feel much more than they feel today that Israel is something which belongs to all the Jewish people. And that's maybe the most important revolutionary change or correction which has to be done to let Zionism which was--until now which was building a kind of wall between Israelis and Jews.

Internationally I--I dream and I believe in one thing; there will be the end of this attempt to impose peace from top down, to impose the peace of the people; there will be understanding that we all are interested to encourage building of a civil society in our area and as a result Israel will lose its monopoly on being the only democratic state in the region. And that will be the most revolutionary step towards real peace in the Middle East.

Moderator: And on that ambitious optimistic note, thank you Natan, Leon, Ruth, Michael; thank you very much.

Michael Oren: Thank you, David.

Moderator: Melvin, over to you.