

# *AIPAC Policy Conference 2009*

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# The New York Times

## At Annual Meeting, Pro-Israel Group Reasserts Clout

By Neil A. Lewis – May 5, 2009

The formidable political strength of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the nation's major pro-Israel lobby, has been on decidedly intentional display here in the last few days.

But this year, Aipac's annual conference comes after a period fraught with small anxieties for the group and its supporters.

Just days ago, the Obama administration said it was seeking the dismissal of charges that two former Aipac analysts had violated an espionage statute by improperly disseminating national security information.

The case against Steven J. Rosen and Keith Weissman had raised what many in the pro-Israel community in the United States regard as an unfair, even toxic question about whether the loyalty of some American Jews to Israel matches or exceeds their loyalty to the United States.

Gary Silow, a Philadelphia-area lawyer and Aipac member at the convention, said he was deeply troubled by the potential for renewed discussion of what he said was the offensive "dual loyalty" issue. In Mr. Silow's view, "the fact that they came after Aipac was what was really disturbing."

Like many at the convention, Mr. Silow said he was relieved at the move for a dismissal.

More than half the members of the House and Senate attended Monday night's dinner, which featured the group's "roll call" in which the lawmakers all rise. It is a conscious -- and effective -- effort to demonstrate the group's influence on Capitol Hill.

Even as the charges were dismissed, the issue of Aipac's role in the capital's political life surfaced again in recent days with the disclosure that Representative Jane Harman, Democrat of California, had been overheard in 2005 on a government wiretap offering to help reduce the charges. Ms. Harman, who has denied she intervened in the Rosen-Weissman case, was greeted with sustained applause when she appeared on Sunday morning.

The site of the conference, the Washington Convention Center, is conveniently, and symbolically, about equally close to the White House and the Capitol, the two objects of Aipac's muscular demonstration. Along with 6,000 delegates, mostly Jewish, leaders of the two branches of government have been attending the convention to offer praise for Aipac and support of Israel, both in generally unreserved language.

The roster of scheduled guests from Sunday through the meeting's conclusion on Tuesday included Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.; Senator John Kerry, the Massachusetts Democrat who is chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee; Newt Gingrich, a former House speaker who remains an important Republican voice; and Rahm Emanuel, the White House chief of staff, who has longstanding ties to Israel. The group also heard from the new Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu (via satellite), and the new opposition leader, Tzipi Livni, and the president, Shimon Peres (in person).

Huge slides of former American presidents were displayed, and there was a murmur of disapproval when the image of Jimmy Carter appeared. Mr. Carter brokered the Camp David peace accords but has turned harshly critical of Israel since leaving office.

Huge slides of former American presidents were displayed, and there was a murmur of disapproval when the image of Jimmy Carter appeared. Mr. Carter brokered the Camp David peace accords but has turned harshly critical of Israel since leaving office.

Speeches are scrutinized closely at Aipac events. As a presidential candidate in June 2008, Barack Obama spoke to Aipac to counter whispers in the American Jewish community that he was insufficiently committed to Israel. Mr. Obama told the group that he regarded them as "friends who share my strong commitment to make sure that the bond between the United States and Israel is unbreakable today, tomorrow and forever."

Mr. Obama went on to win an estimated 78 percent of the Jewish vote, a figure higher than that won four years earlier by Mr. Kerry.

Many of the Aipac attendees are planning to fan out on Capitol Hill on Tuesday to brace lawmakers with their views. Aipac's spokesman, Josh Block, said there were 508 appointments at Congressional offices.

The conference's literature is filled with suggestions for lobbying as in "don't be late" and "be direct" in making your case.

Aipac officials say the key to their success is linking their supporters across the country with their local elected lawmakers. "Relationships matter" is a slogan plastered around the convention hall. Aipac does not make political donations but encourages its members to do so.

Last year, some prominent American Jews, asserting that Aipac's generally down-the-line support of Israeli policy was neither helpful to Israel nor wise, founded a counter group called J Street. J Street, which is only a tiny percentage of the size of Aipac, is vocal about supporting lawmakers who might disagree with some Israeli policies. Aipac officials have tried to treat J Street as if it were lint.

# POLITICO

## Cautious optimism at AIPAC conf.

Ben Smith – May 3, 2009

American allies of Israel met in Washington Sunday to celebrate victories in the early weeks of the Obama administration, but also felt a current of hazy relationship between two newly elected leaders, President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Members of The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the largest American pro-Israel group, have reason for confidence in the new administration, having won two symbolic battles in President Obama's first hundred days. A critic of Israel lost an appointment to a top intelligence post after supporters of the state loudly objected to the pick, and the Obama Justice Department on Friday dropped pending charges against two AIPAC staffers of violating the Espionage Act by mishandling classified information.

And Saturday, the group announced Vice President Joe Biden would speak at the conference Tuesday.

But the American relationship with Israel remains a key question mark of the Obama administration's foreign policy. The new Israeli government is led by a conservative who clashed with the Clinton Administration and has a hawkish provocateur as its foreign minister. And with the specter of a nuclear Iran on the forefront of the minds of Israel and its allies, President Obama's mix of outreach and warnings to the Islamic Republic has not soothed nerves.

Speaking to some 6,500 assembled for the conference, Robert Satloff, the executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, warned of "the potential for a deep disagreement between the U.S. and Israel governments over how to really deal with a nuclear Iran."

The issue could produce "the most tense face-to-face disagreement between the United States and Israel in the past 61 years," he said.

Other close observers of the relationship say its contours remain unclear.

"Barack Obama still has to prove himself to American friends of Israel, who still don't know where his heart is on Israel," said a Democratic member of the House of Representatives. "And Bibi has to prove he is up to this moment."

If the scale of the giant, expensively-produced AIPAC gathering at the Washington Convention Center - always an opportunity for the organization to flex its muscle - was any sign, American politicians remain supportive of the Jewish state. More than half of the members of Congress, along with top leaders of both parties, were expected to turn out for some part of the conference.

And Congressional Democrats - over the objections of some in their party - were also central to forcing out Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair's first pick to chair the National Intelligence Council, Charles Freeman, a former ambassador to Saudi Arabia who has been a critic of Israel.

Congresswoman Jane Harman, who is battling federal law enforcement over a leaked transcript of a wiretapped conversation between her and allies of Israel, participated in a panel Sunday morning, and was cheered for

attacking the wiretapping and subsequent leaking to the press of her conversations with allies of Israel, calling it an "abuse of power."

"This issue is obviously creating a chilling effect on hardworking bipartisan members of Congress who care intensely about the U.S.-Israel security relationship and have every right to talk to advocacy groups and our good friends about that relationship," she said.

Abbe Lowell, the lawyer of one of the two former AIPAC employees who'd been charged, praised the new administration for dropping the charges in a case alleging they had passed sensitive information to Israeli officials.

"The AIPAC policy conference reflects the universal and broad support of the American people for the strong relationship between the U.S. and Israel," said AIPAC spokesman Josh Block.

Israeli officials and AIPAC leaders say the prospect of a rift between the left-leaning American leader and the Israeli rightist are overstated. They say Obama's top aides - like Iran specialist Dennis Ross - recognize the threat coming from the Iran. And people familiar with the White House's thinking on the Middle East say they broadly share the Israeli hope that Arab states' fear of a nuclear Iran could help restart the peace process, though they differ on whether Israeli concessions to the Palestinians would have to be part of such a shift.

A top Netanyahu adviser, Ron Dermer, told POLITICO that Obama and Netanyahu share the "bold" instincts to trade traditional, incremental political negotiations for game-changing regional shifts centered on Iran.

"There will not be a clash of the titans," Dermer said of Obama and Netanyahu. "The prime minister of Israel - far from being a prophet of doom - actually believes that peace is possible."

An American official involved with the relationship with Israel said the U.S. wants to avoid visible rifts, particularly in advance of Netanyahu's planned May 18 visit to Washington.

"Nobody's interested in a public confrontation," said the official, who cautioned that that reticence didn't mean Obama had backed off his push to restart political negotiations toward creating two states.

Netanyahu has been largely silent on the question of whether an independent Palestine is possible, and has argued that security and economic assistance to the Palestinians should precede any peace talks.

The U.S., officials said, want Netanyahu to commit to a political peace process, a notion to which the Israeli has been cool.

"There is no way now where you have on the Palestinian side a willingness to make the kinds of compromises that will be required for the core issues," said Dermer.

Americans who watch the relationship closely expect Obama to use Netanyahu's own political need for a strong, amicable relationship with the White House to bring the Israeli back to the negotiating table on thorny questions like West Bank settlements.

But the White House, too, has an interest in a good relationship between Obama and Netanyahu.

"You cannot make peace over Israel's dead body," said a former longtime American peace negotiator, Aaron David Miller. "You have to work out a relationship with the Israeli Prime Minister if you want to get anything done."

The White House has also been, so far, ignoring comments from Israel's nationalist foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, who has called for a loyalty test for Arab Israeli citizens and recently bragged to a Russian newspaper that "America accepts all of our decisions."

Dermer downplayed Lieberman's role in setting policy.

"You have a few senators - you never want to get in between them and a microphone," he said in response to a question about the foreign minister. "We have plenty of ministers like that. I wouldn't pay too much attention to what this or that minister says," he said.

Another expert on Mideast policy who thinks the sides will avoid conflict was Steve Rosen, one of the two former AIPAC staffers against whom charges were dropped last week.

"That the art of the thing is to find a practical path and to defy the naysayers and to defy the doomsayers and to show the US-Israel relationship is alive and well, and I think that's what AIPAC expects to achieve," he said.

Rosen himself, though, remains an irritant for AIPAC. He sued the group for defamation after it fired him after the charges were leveled, and said he hadn't heard from AIPAC leaders since those charges were dropped aside from "a somewhat threatening message from an AIPAC attorney," which he declined to further describe.

"If they're going to stay on that path they're headed for a very bloody battle," he said of his defamation suit.

An AIPAC spokesman, Patrick Dorton, said Rosen's suit is "without merit" and that the group will "defend itself vigorously."

# POLITICO

## AIPAC launches push for Iran sanctions

By Andrew Glass – May 4, 2009

These are challenging times for AIPAC, the nation's pre-eminent pro-Israeli lobby.

Just how challenging will become more evident on Tuesday when some 6,500 delegates to the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee fan out on Capitol Hill for more than 500 separate meetings with lawmakers and key aides aimed largely at dealing with Iran's nuclear threat against the Jewish state.

"Tomorrow is the day the rubber meets the road," AIPAC president David Victor told the conferees Monday before they disbursed for regionally oriented pre-lobbying briefings at the Washington Convention Center. "This is a moment of danger... We are the only constituency in America making this [anti-Iranian] case."

Victor noted that Congress is embroiled in a host of top priority domestic issues, including the ailing U.S. economy and soaring federal deficits. These issues, he feared, could adversely impact legislative backing for a pending foreign aid bill that AIPAC hopes would contain nearly \$2.8 billion in security aid to Israel.

This year, AIPAC has trained its heaviest lobbying guns at securing passage of newly introduced legislation that would require President Barack Obama to sanction foreign firms that sell, ship or insure gasoline and diesel fuel to Iran - unless the Iranians succumb to diplomatic pressure and agree to drop their long-standing nuclear ambitions.

The legislation "tells companies that you can do business with America or you can do business with Iran," Victor said.

The tough sanctions bill was introduced last week by 27 senators, led by Evan Bayh (D-Ind.) and Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.). A companion measure sponsored by Reps. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, the panel's ranking Republican, is pending in the House.

Vice President Joe Biden addresses the AIPAC delegates Tuesday. And he could deliver a conventional boilerplate pro-Israel speech, or he could clarify whether the administration views AIPAC's all-out push for tougher sanctions against Iran as undercutting Obama's offer to re-engage with the Iranian leaders after three decades of frigid relations.

In return for its support, the administration could also attempt to negotiate a compromise with the lawmakers that would amend the pending Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act so as to give Obama some discretion to suspend its implementation.

In its present form, the bill would severely impact many European firms now doing business in Iran.



## **Netanyahu Says Peace Process Will Include West Bank Economy**

By Viola Gienger and Indira A.R. Lakshmanan – May 5, 2009

WASHINGTON (Bloomberg) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who took office five weeks ago, said peace talks with the Palestinians will be augmented with steps to improve the economy of the West Bank.

Netanyahu outlined his “triple track” approach of pursuing political, security and economic progress for the Palestinians to the annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in Washington yesterday. He spoke via satellite from Jerusalem.

“We want to work with the Palestinian Authority on this track, not as a substitute for political negotiations, but as a booster,” Netanyahu said. “I believe that this triple track towards peace is the realistic path.”

Netanyahu sought to reassure the conference over skepticism he had expressed toward talks held with the Palestinians by his predecessor Ehud Olmert. President Barack Obama has stepped up pressure on Israel and the Palestinians to accelerate peace efforts and last month invited leaders of both sides and Egypt to separate talks in Washington.

Israeli President Shimon Peres, who addressed the conference earlier, is scheduled to meet with Obama today and Netanyahu will visit Washington later this month.

The U.S. wants to help create a Palestinian state that is dedicated to peaceful ties with Israel. While Netanyahu has stopped short of endorsing Palestinian statehood, Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon said in a May 3 interview that “long- term peace and stability” involves the two-state solution.

### **‘Right to Govern’**

“The Palestinian people have the right to govern themselves,” Peres said in Washington. “We don’t want to be their masters.”

Peres told the conference “there is no difference between the American position and our position.”

Peres also called the Arab League’s 2002 declaration that it was ready to negotiate with and eventually recognize Israel “a U-turn” that Israel hopes “will be translated into action.”

“I trust that the leadership of President Obama will pave the way to both a regional agreement and meaningful bilateral negotiations,” Peres said.

Netanyahu said Arab leaders who once focused on Israel as a threat are turning their attention more and more to the potential that Iran may develop a nuclear weapon.

## **‘Common Danger’**

“For the first time in my life, I believe for the first time in a century, Arabs and Jews see a common danger,” Netanyahu said. “Iran must not be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon.”

Netanyahu’s comments echoed observations in recent weeks by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other U.S. officials and lawmakers, who view the convergence of concern as a possible way of bringing Israel together with more of its Arab neighbors.

Iran, which says it’s developing nuclear power as an energy source, has rebuffed United Nations Security Council demands that it scale back its program and open it to wider scrutiny to prove its peaceful intent.

Netanyahu told the conference he plans to take up the question when he meets with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak during a visit next week to the country that has been at peace with Israel since 1979.

“We seek expanded relations with the Arab world,” Netanyahu told the audience of more than 6,000 activists, elected U.S. officials, students and others. “We want peace with the Arabs.”



## **Arabs should start normalizing with Israel: Kerry**

May 5, 2009

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Arab states should boost peace hopes by starting now to normalize with Israel through lifting the embargo and allowing Israeli flights over their countries, leading US Senator John Kerry urged Tuesday.

Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, urged Arabs to start "treating Israel like a normal country, ending the boycott, letting El Al fly over their countries and meeting Israel leaders."

Arab countries have for decades imposed a boycott on companies doing business with the Jewish state as a sign of support for the Palestinians.

The senator, speaking to the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a powerful lobby, added that Arab countries must also take active steps to end anti-Israeli sentiment.

"Most of all the poisonous rhetoric emanating from too many Arab TV stations and too many preachers' pulpits has to stop," Kerry added.

"Books in the hands of school children must tell history as it really happened and show maps with countries as they really exist," he said. "You cannot make peace out of one side of your mouth and preach hate out of the other."

Speaking to AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobby in Washington, Kerry said "lack of support from Arab states" was a key reason that the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks failed in 2000 and degenerated into violence.

But he said there is a shift in the region in which Arabs now embrace the idea of land for peace and are arrayed against Iran, a non-Arab and mainly Shiite Muslim country that is spreading its influence in mainly Sunni Muslim Arab lands.

Kerry, the Democratic Party's nominee for president in 2004, welcomed the Arab peace initiative of 2002 which calls for normalizing ties with Israel in exchange for the Jewish state withdrawing from Arab lands seized in 1967.

But the "Arabs cannot wait for Israel to make all the sacrifices" for improving relations, Kerry said. "They should start doing so right now."



## Israeli PM wants 'triple track' approach to peace

By Richard Lardner – May 5, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israel's prime minister on Monday outlined a "triple track" approach to peace with the Palestinians, a strategy that emphasizes political, economic and security planks to resolve the decades-long conflict.

Benjamin Netanyahu said his government is ready to resume peace negotiations without any delays or preconditions.

"The sooner the better," Netanyahu told a convention of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby in Washington. Netanyahu's brief remarks were broadcast by satellite from Jerusalem.

He also cautioned, however, that Israel never would compromise its own security as it seeks peace.

Echoing remarks to the convention made earlier in the day by Shimon Peres, Israel's president, Netanyahu said Iran must not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons. Netanyahu said Jews and Arabs in the Middle East share that goal and must work together to meet it.

"For the first time in my lifetime, Arabs and Jews see a common danger," he said. "There is a great challenge ahead. But that challenge also presents great opportunities."

While the Obama administration supports a two-state solution to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Netanyahu did not mention creation of a Palestinian state during his remarks.

Instead, he proposed his three-track strategy, which he called a "fresh approach" that would improve the quality of life for Palestinians while preserving Israel's security.

The political track is focused on resuming peace negotiations. The security track would strengthen what he called the "security apparatus" of the Palestinians, Netanyahu said. On the economic track, Netanyahu said Israel is prepared to remove as many obstacles as possible to advance the Palestinian economy.

"I want to see Palestinian youngsters know that they have a future," he said. "I want them not to be hostage to a cult of death, and despair and hate."

But Netanyahu's pitch for peace was tempered by what he called "two provisos."

First, if Israel abandons its own security, "we'll have neither security nor peace," he said. Second, for any peace settlement to be achieved, the Palestinians must recognize Israel as the Jewish state, Netanyahu said.



## Israeli president: US outreach to Iran OK for now

By Anne Gearan – May 5, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israeli President Shimon Peres cautiously endorsed new U.S. outreach to Iran following a longer-than-expected visit with President Barack Obama on Tuesday, telling The Associated Press that the American leader should be given a chance to resolve differences with Iran through negotiation.

Peres is the first top-level Israeli to visit the new president. A more important gauge of relations between Israel and the United States will come later this month, when Israel's hawkish new prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, meets Obama at the White House. Netanyahu has not ruled out military action against Iran and as a candidate opposed giving up land for peace with the Palestinians.

Peres said he emerged from the nearly hour-long session reassured that the United States under Obama will prize Israel's security and will not allow Iran to possess nuclear weapons.

"As long as the goal is clear, why not try all means?" Peres said of the latest U.S. overtures toward Iran. "If you can achieve it by engagement, God bless you."

That played down the potential for a split between Israel and its closest ally and defender over the best way to deal with Iran, a crucial Mideast power whose leader regularly calls for Israel's destruction.

Obama has made tentative and inconclusive overtures to Iran since becoming president in January. As a candidate he alarmed some in Israel, and some of the Jewish state's strongest U.S. backers, by pledging to meet Iran's leaders face to face if it would help U.S. goals in the region.

Iran denies it is trying to build nuclear weapons; Israel is presumed to already have them.

Peres said he made clear that Israel still considers Iran a mortal threat. He steered around a discussion of what either country might do if Iran spurned the offer of a new relationship with the United States, or if it appeared on the verge of getting the bomb.

"As long as they don't exclude any option, let ... the United States select the order of things," Peres said.

Peres, elected separately, said the new Netanyahu government will abide by agreements made by past Israeli leaders, including the pledge to negotiate for a separate Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Although Netanyahu has avoided any explicit endorsement of the so-called "two-state solution," Peres suggested that Netanyahu embraces an idea of peace that accomplishes the same thing. The new prime minister has said he welcomes negotiations and that he does not want to govern the Palestinians, Peres noted.

"So you can make whatever you want," of the terminology, Peres said.

Earlier Tuesday, Vice President Joe Biden challenged Israel to back a two-state peace agreement with the Palestinians and urged the Jewish state's new leadership to demonstrate its commitment to such a solution.

In a speech to the leading pro-Israel lobby in the United States, Biden said Netanyahu's government should stop constructing new Jewish settlements and ease restrictions on Palestinians.

"Israel has to work toward a two-state solution," Biden told the annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. "You're not going to like my saying this, but not build more settlements, dismantle existing outposts and allow Palestinians freedom of movement."

Speaking to the same conference by satellite from Jerusalem, Netanyahu on Monday said his government is ready to resume peace talks with the Palestinians "the sooner the better" and outlined a "triple track" approach to peace with the Palestinians, a strategy that emphasizes political, economic and security planks to resolve the decades-long conflict.

He did not mention creation of a Palestinian state during his remarks.



## **Peres: Israel Supports Two-State Solution, Iran Engagement**

### **Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Afghan President Hamid Karzai are also in Washington, in the run-up to a three-way meeting with Obama Wednesday.**

By Wendell Goler, Reena Ninan, Major Garrett and The Associated Press – May 5, 2009

Israel is on board with key elements of President Obama's agenda in the Middle East, Israeli President Shimon Peres told reporters Tuesday after meeting with Obama at the White House.

He said that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would support a two-state solution to achieve peace between the Israelis and Palestinians and that if Obama wants to engage Iran, the Israelis are willing to back him.

"Mr. Netanyahu said he will cooperate (with) the commitments of the previous (Israeli) government. The previous government accepted the roadmap (to Middle East peace). In the roadmap, you'll find the attitude to the two-state solution," Peres said.

He said Netanyahu is ready to "start to negotiate right away" and does not want to "govern the Palestinian people."

The Tuesday sit-down was meant to lay the groundwork for a meeting later this month with Netanyahu which the U.S. president hopes will lead to a resumption of the Middle East peace process.

The White House released a statement Tuesday noting that Peres and Obama discussed issues "including the pursuit of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and Iran's nuclear program" and saying Obama looks forward to the meeting with Netanyahu.

Peres, more moderate than Netanyahu, had been downplaying the new Israeli leader's previous refusal to endorse the "two-state solution" that has been the foundation of U.S. policy since early in the Bush administration.

The push for a two-state solution was also at the heart of a political flap Tuesday over the tone the administration was taking with its top ally in the Middle East.

Sources say the White House is considering offering Israel greater assistance in deterring Iran's nuclear ambitions in exchange for movement toward a Palestinian state. Israeli media reported that White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel even privately told members of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee that the Iran issue hinged on peace talks with Palestinians.

But officials later said Emanuel's comments were not meant to pressure the Israelis. Sources said he told AIPAC members that America's Arab allies, in particular Jordan, would find it easier to support tougher sanctions on Iran if there were progress toward an Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Jordan's population contains more Palestinian refugees than native Jordanians.

"This administration does not believe that ... there's an either-or option here," White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said. "I think it's a pretty obvious point that while we can make progress on one it will help on the other. But we can do both simultaneously."

One official said the White House believes a two-state solution can minimize the influence of Hamas and Hezbollah in Gaza and Lebanon, in turn depriving Iran of influence in and around Israel.

Vice President Biden bluntly set the administration's terms in the road to Middle East peace, in a speech Tuesday to AIPAC.

Biden challenged Israel to back a two-state peace agreement with the Palestinians and urged the Jewish state's new leadership to demonstrate its commitment to such a solution. Biden also said Netanyahu's government should stop constructing new Jewish settlements and ease restrictions on Palestinians.

"Israel has to work toward a two-state solution," Biden said. "You're not going to like my saying this, but not build more settlements, dismantle existing outposts and allow Palestinians freedom of movement."

Meanwhile, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Afghan President Hamid Karzai also were in Washington, in the run-up to a three-way meeting with Obama on Wednesday.

Zardari and Karzai will meet first Wednesday with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton before heading to the White House.



## Peres vows firm Iran stance amid unease over Obama policy

By Lachlan Carmichael – May 4, 2009

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Israeli President Shimon Peres vowed Monday that Israel will not yield to Iran's nuclear threat as he prepared to meet US President Barack Obama, who has stirred unease with his policies toward Iran.

Peres, who will be the first top Israeli to meet Obama since the US president's inauguration, also voiced hope for peace with the Palestinians and other Arabs before his talks at the White House on Tuesday.

"Unfortunately the Middle East finds itself in the shadow of a nuclear threat. We shall not give up. We shall not surrender," Peres told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a powerful lobby.

His tough talk on Iran drew cheers and applause at the annual policy conference of AIPAC, which is pushing for a tougher US stance on Iran.

"Historically, Iran sought to enrich mankind. Today, alas, Iran's rulers want to enrich uranium. What for?" he asked, referring to fears it aimed to produce an atomic bomb.

"In addition to their nuclear option, they invest huge capital in long-range missiles."

He also warned of the threat to peace in the region through Iran's support of anti-Israeli groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Peres, whose post is mostly ceremonial, did not go into specifics about countering the Iranian threat.

But, at a time when the Obama administration seeks to engage diplomatically with the Islamic Republic, which has vowed to destroy Israel, AIPAC is lobbying for new US legislation unveiled last week.

The bill looks to tighten the screws on Tehran, which imports about 40 percent of its gasoline, by targeting firms that finance gasoline exports to Iran, or either ship or insure the exports.

Iran has continued its efforts to enrich uranium despite three sets of sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton talked generally last month of "very tough" sanctions against Iran if it rebuffs the new US approach.

Robert Satloff, an analyst who joined an AIPAC panel on Sunday, warned of "the potential for a deep disagreement between the US and Israel governments over how to really deal with a nuclear Iran," according to an AIPAC video.

"If not handled properly," the head of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy said, the issue could produce "the most tense face-to-face disagreement between the United States and Israel in the past 61 years."

Middle East analyst Aaron David Miller, who has served in both Republican and Democratic administrations, expected Peres to "be candid about the severity of the threat from Iran" when he meets Obama.

Peres meanwhile vowed to pursue peace talks with the Palestinians and Arabs from a position of strength.

The veteran Israeli leader said he will deliver to Obama "a strong message for a country yearning for peace," adding: "Today there is a chance for real peace."

The Nobel Peace laureate will also become the first Israeli leader to meet Obama since Benjamin Netanyahu, who has taken a harder line on the Palestinians than Peres, was elected prime minister of Israel in February.

Obama has invited Netanyahu as well as the Palestinian and Egyptian leaders to Washington within the coming weeks. A White House official said the meetings would probably occur before Obama travels to France on June 6.

Netanyahu has so far refused to publicly endorse the creation of a Palestinian state, and has insisted on centering efforts on strengthening the West Bank economy before engaging in final status negotiations.

The Obama administration remains however focused on a two-state solution and continuing the peace talks.

Israel's firebrand Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has also sparked concern by declaring last month that the Jewish state was not bound by the US-backed 2007 agreement that relaunched peace talks.

But Peres said: "The present government of Israel will abide by the commitments of the previous governments of Israel."

AIPAC officials said it was not unusual for Obama and Clinton, who both attended the policy conference as presidential candidates last year, to be absent from this year's gathering.

They said US presidents have only spoken to the policy conference four times in all and noted that Vice President Joe Biden will attend Tuesday.



## **Netanyahu calls for 'fresh' approach to peace talks**

May 4, 2009

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Monday for a "fresh" triple-track approach to peace with the Palestinians that includes an immediate resumption of talks without conditions.

But Netanyahu, speaking to a powerful pro-Israel lobby in Washington via a satellite hook-up from Jerusalem, did not mention the goal of a two-state solution embraced by the new US administration of President Barack Obama.

"I believe it's possible to achieve (peace), but I think it requires a fresh approach," he told the annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

"The fresh approach that I suggest is pursuing a triple track toward peace between Israel and the Palestinians: a political track, a security track and economic track," Netanyahu said.

"The political track is that we're prepared to resume peace negotiations without any delay and without any preconditions, the sooner the better," he told the 6,500 AIPAC delegates, foreign ambassadors and US politicians.

The security track involves continuing talks involving US General Keith Dayton in cooperation with the Jordanians and the US-backed Palestinian Authority of president Mahmud Abbas, in order to bolster Palestinian security forces.

"The economic track means we are prepared to work together to remove as many obstacles as we can to the advancement of the ... Palestinian economy," he said.

"We want to work with the Palestinian Authority on this track not as a substitute for negotiations but as a booster," said Netanyahu, who speaks in fluent American-accented English.

"I want to see Palestinian youngsters know that they have a future," he added. "I want them to have jobs," he added, stirring applause.

With such a "realistic" approach and the help of Obama and Abbas, "we can defy the skeptics, we can surprise the world," he said.

However, Netanyahu, who said he is due to visit the White House in two weeks, warned that peace will not come without security.

"We shall never compromise on Israel's security. Secondly, for a final peace settlement to be achieved, the Palestinians must recognize Israel as the Jewish state," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu has so far refused to publicly endorse the creation of a Palestinian state, and has insisted on focusing efforts on strengthening the West Bank economy before engaging in negotiations on a final status agreement.

The US special envoy to the region, George Mitchell, has nevertheless stressed several times that Washington's efforts were focused on a two-state solution and continuing the peace talks.

Israel's firebrand Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has also sparked concern by declaring last month that the Jewish state was not bound by the US-backed 2007 agreement that relaunched peace talks.

He also said that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process needed a new approach as previous talks have all "reached a dead end."

## **U.S., Israel Diverge on Palestinian Plan**

By Jay Solomon – May 5, 2009

WASHINGTON—Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged Monday to pursue "without any delay" a peace process with Palestinians based on a new strategy of addressing political, economic and security issues concurrently.

But Mr. Netanyahu's overture came as members of his government voiced skepticism toward President Barack Obama's call for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, particularly when the Palestinian Authority's security forces remain weak and its political leadership divided.

Mr. Netanyahu, his aides said, also wants to limit the powers to be granted to any Palestinian government, arguing that certain military capabilities could pose a threat to Israel.

Mr. Netanyahu "was elected to change the direction of the peace process," Ron Dermer, a senior adviser to the prime minister, said Sunday at the conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the U.S.'s largest pro-Israel lobbying group. Mr. Dermer suggested Israel's new government will seek a gradual approach on the question of Palestinian statehood, placing a higher priority on institution-building than diplomacy.

Mr. Obama has said he wants to move ahead aggressively with Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on a two-state solution at the same time the Palestinian Authority's institutions are strengthened and unified, carrying forward a process started by the Bush administration.

Despite repeated calls from Washington to focus on the Palestinian issue, Mr. Netanyahu's government is making the campaign to end Iran's nuclear program its No. 1 foreign-policy initiative. Israeli officials said the Iranian nuclear program is a threat that should unify Jerusalem with both the U.S. and Arab nations.

"For the first time in my lifetime, Arabs and Jews see a common danger," Mr. Netanyahu told the Aipac conference Monday night via satellite from Israel. "There is a great challenge afoot. But that challenge also presents great opportunities."

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said the Iran issue shouldn't pre-empt talks with Palestinians on an independent state. "For Israel to get the kind of strong support it is looking for vis-a-vis Iran, it can't stay on the sidelines with respect to the Palestinians and the peace efforts. They go hand in hand," she told a House committee last month.

Mr. Netanyahu said his government would pursue a "triple track" of making peace with the Palestinians, working to strengthen the economy and security forces in the Palestinian territories while moving ahead with negotiations. Members of his government have criticized their predecessors for moving forward with the idea of a Palestinian state without developing the needed security and economic structure to guarantee Israel's survival.

This approach is "not a substitute for political negotiations," Mr. Netanyahu said. "It is a booster."

Israeli President Shimon Peres will meet Mr. Obama at the White House on Tuesday. Mr. Netanyahu is scheduled to visit Mr. Obama in Washington on May 18.

Mr. Peres, speaking to Aipac Monday, offered a conciliatory line to the Arab states, saying Mr. Obama's election offered a new path to peace. Mr. Peres particularly praised Saudi Arabia for putting forward in 2002 the Arab Peace Plan under which Arab countries would recognize Israel diplomatically in return for Jerusalem giving back lands annexed during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

"I trust that the leadership of President Obama will pave the way to both a regional agreement and meaningful bilateral negotiations" with the Arab states, Mr. Peres said.

Mr. Peres also sought to counter the depiction of Mr. Netanyahu as hostile toward the peace process. "He knows history and wants to make history," Mr. Peres said. "In our tradition, making history is making peace."

Syria could emerge as a divisive issue between Israel and the U.S., Middle East analysts say. Mr. Obama has pledged to help broker an agreement between Jerusalem and Damascus aimed at ending the conflict over the disputed Golan Heights region. Mr. Netanyahu, however, said during his campaign this year that he isn't prepared to hand over land for peace with Syria.

# The Washington Post

## Calif.'s Harman Rails Against Wiretapping That Ensnared Her

By Mary Beth Sheridan – May 4, 2009

Rep. Jane Harman vowed yesterday to clear her name after the revelation of a wiretapped conversation in which she reportedly agreed to intervene in the federal investigation of two pro-Israel lobbyists in exchange for help in getting a coveted congressional post.

The California Democrat noted that she had called on the Justice Department to release all the information it had about secretly monitored conversations that involved her.

"I want it all out there. I want it in public. I want everyone to understand, including me, what has happened," Harman said before a packed auditorium at the opening of the annual policy convention of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or AIPAC, the powerful pro-Israel lobby group.

News organizations reported last month that Harman was caught on a wiretap speaking to a suspected Israeli agent about two AIPAC lobbyists accused of illegally passing classified information to foreign officials and reporters. The congresswoman reportedly agreed to press Bush administration officials to show leniency toward the men, the reports said. In return, the suspected agent said he would lobby for Harman to get the chairmanship of the House intelligence committee, according to an article on the Congressional Quarterly Web site, which first reported the wiretap.

The FBI opened a preliminary investigation of Harman at the time but later closed it, officials said. The congresswoman, a longtime AIPAC supporter, has denied contacting the White House or Justice Department about the two lobbyists. Harman was passed over for the intelligence committee chairmanship when Democrats took control of the House in 2006.

Harman has described the wiretap as an abuse of government power. But sources have told The Washington Post that she was not being surveilled; the tapped phone belonged to the suspected Israeli agent, who happened to talk to her.

"I will not quit on this until I am absolutely sure this can never happen to anyone else," Harman told the AIPAC audience, which warmly applauded her. She said the incident was having "a chilling effect" on members of Congress who "care intensely about the U.S.-Israeli security relationship . . . and have every right to talk to advocacy groups."

Federal prosecutors last week dropped the case against the former lobbyists, Steven J. Rosen and Keith Weissman, saying recent court rulings had changed the legal dynamics and made it unlikely they would win.



## **Biden defends outreach to Iran in AIPAC speech**

By Bridget Johnson – May 5, 2009

Vice President Biden told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) on Tuesday morning that Israel remains the administration's "most treasured ally" while defending diplomatic overtures to Iran.

Saying that the election of President Obama was a call by Americans "to change ... the trajectory that the world was on," Biden said there is "one enduring essential principle that will not change, and that is our commitment to the peace and security of the state of Israel."

"That is not negotiable," Biden said. "That is not a matter of change."

But Biden stressed that American foreign policy would change, as he sought to reassure the packed AIPAC crowd at the Washington Convention Center that those changes wouldn't endanger the security of Israel.

"All the good intentions of the last decade have not resulted in a more secure, more stable Middle East," Biden said.

Biden added that Obama had a "personal connection to the Zionist idea." In the introduction of the vice president, the crowd was reminded several times that Biden has called himself a Zionist.

"There will always be a place for the Jews of the world to go and that place always must be Israel," the vice president said to a standing ovation.

While noting that "a nuclear-armed Iran risks an arms race in the region," Biden conceded that "what will work remains to be seen" in stemming the threat.

"That's why we will pursue direct, principled democracy with Iran," Biden said, adding that the U.S. "will approach Iran initially in the spirit of mutual respect."

Going to talks first will give the U.S. greater leverage, Biden said.

"If our efforts to address this problem through engagement are not successful, we have greater international support to consider other options," he said. "We must sometimes act alone, but it's always stronger when we act in unison."

Biden also stressed the importance of a two-state solution — a key issue in talks later Tuesday with Israeli President Shimon Peres and with visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on May 18 — receiving a mixed reaction from the crowd.

The road map "can be achieved," Biden said. "The fact that peace has not occurred does not mean that peace cannot occur."

"Israelis and Palestinians have sufficient common interests to bring this goal within reach."

Biden called for the “unconditional release” of Gilad Shalit, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldier still held by Hamas in Gaza after being kidnapped in June 2006, and called on Arab countries to aid the peace process.

“Now is the time for Arab states to make meaningful gestures to show the Israeli leadership and the people that the promise of ending Israel’s isolation in the region is real,” the vice president said.

Biden wrapped up his address by saying the delay of the peace process was “not an option.”

“The path we’ve been on in recent years will not result in security or prosperity for Israel or the Palestinians,” Biden said.

Biden was preceded at AIPAC by his successor as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), who called America’s commitment to Israel “a matter of gut and heart.”

“Israel is more than just an ally and fellow democracy,” Kerry said, noting that “even a few Jews from Boston, Mass., have all come to Israel’s shores.”

Kerry said he met with Noam Shalit, the father of Gilad Shalit, on his visit to D.C. last week. “As a parent I share his anguish, but I am confident that the day will come when Gilad is returned to his family and the country he loves,” Kerry said, adding that he’d raised the IDF’s soldiers case in talks with Egypt and Syria.

Kerry also broached the topic of diplomatic outreach to Iran.

“When we say a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable, we mean it,” Kerry said. “President Obama wants to talk with Iran and I believe it is important to give that strategy a chance.

“Outreach alone is not a strategy,” he added. “If diplomacy is to work, it must be backed by the prospect of tough, escalating, multilateral sanctions strong enough to actually change behavior.”

On the subject of Middle East peace, Kerry called on Israel to freeze new settlement activity that he said “undercut[s] President [Mahmoud] Abbas and strengthen[s] Hamas.” He also called on Arab states to start treating Israel “like a normal country” and halt “poisonous rhetoric” against the Jewish state from Arabic media outlets and pulpits.

“You cannot make peace out of one side of your mouth and preach hate out of the other,” Kerry said. “The window of opportunity for a two-state solution is fast closing.”

AIPAC spokesman Joshua Block told The Hill that at the conclusion of the three-day conference Tuesday, the pro-Israel group had 515 lobbying appointments scheduled on Capitol Hill.



## **US has limited time to allow Iran engagement to work: Biden**

May 5, 2009

WASHINGTON (AFP) — US Vice President Joseph Biden assured a pro-Israel lobby Tuesday that Barack Obama's administration knows it has only limited time to allow for the success of its new policy of diplomatic engagement with Iran.

"We are intensely focused on avoiding the grave danger...of a nuclear armed Iran," Biden told the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"A nuclear armed Iran risks an arms race in the region that would make every country less secure," he said.

"What we have tried with Iran in recent years has obviously not worked," he said, referring to former president George W. Bush's refusal to open dialogue with Iran until it stops sensitive nuclear work.

"What will work remains to be seen," the vice president added.

"Since 2000 Iran has installed thousands of centrifuges and produced thousands of kilograms of low-enriched uranium," he said, referring to a uranium enrichment program that has fueled US and Israeli fears that Tehran aims to build an atomic bomb.

"Instead of arresting the danger, in the last six years the danger has grown," he added.

"That's why we will pursue direct, principled diplomacy with Iran with the overriding goal of preventing it from acquiring nuclear weapons," he said.

"We want Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations," he said.

"If our efforts to address this problem through engagement are not successful, we have greater international support to consider other options," he said.

"International support matters as we learned over the last eight years," he added.

"Given the situation we inherited, we know we don't have unlimited time to make this assessment," he said.

AIPAC is lobbying for new US legislation that would tighten the screws on Tehran by targeting firms that finance, ship or insure gasoline exports to Iran, which imports about 40 percent of its gasoline.

Iran has continued its efforts to enrich uranium despite three sets of sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council.

Robert Satloff, the head of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy warned in an AIPAC panel discussion Sunday of "the potential for a deep disagreement between the US and Israel governments over how to really deal with a nuclear Iran."

If not handled properly, he said, the issue could produce "the most tense face-to-face disagreement between the United States and Israel in the past 61 years."

## **Biden firm on two-state solution despite Netanyahu's mixed signals**

**Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday that he's ready for immediate talks with the Palestinians, but he won't endorse a Palestinian state.**

By Ilene R. Prusher – May 5, 2009

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is stepping up the message he's trying to sell to the Obama administration: Israel is ready to resume peace talks with the Palestinians immediately. But the new premier in town - unlike his predecessor - does not see the two-state solution as the answer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Mr. Netanyahu's aids emphasize that he has not ruled out such a solution, but he will not endorse that formula, which was the basis of the Oslo Accords Israel signed with the PLO in 1993.

This mixed message has immediately been met with mixed reactions. Palestinian leaders, as well as officials in the Obama administration, have made it clear that they see no other way forward, and that the creation of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel must be the ultimate goal of peace talks.

Vice President Joe Biden said Tuesday that Israel "has to work for a two-state solution ... not build more settlements, dismantle existing outposts, and allow Palestinians freedom of movement." He made the remarks at the annual meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a powerful pro-Israel lobby in the US.

"The political track means that we are prepared to resume peace negotiations without any delay and without any preconditions – the sooner the better," Netanyahu said Monday in an address via satellite to the AIPAC meeting. Netanyahu said that he wanted to see progress on three tracks: political, security, and economic.

His words seemed intended as a sign that he was not seeking peace solely through developing better economic relations with the Palestinian Authority, which seemed to be the crux of his message when he entered office last month.

"But there are two provisos that I think have to be said at this point," Netanyahu added in his address. "First, peace will not come without security. If we abandon security, we'll have neither security nor peace. So I want to be very clear – we shall never compromise on Israel's security. Second, for a final peace settlement to be achieved, the Palestinians must recognize Israel as the Jewish state. They must recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people."

This has become a catchphrase of Netanyahu's new cabinet, and is interpreted by many as a demand that Palestinians give up their demand for the "right of return" to areas they left in 1948, when Israel was created.

In reaction to Netanyahu's speech, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat suggested that without a commitment to past agreements, it would be difficult to envision progress.

"Netanyahu must explicitly endorse the establishment of an independent, viable, and sovereign Palestinian state, which remains the cornerstone of the two-state solution. Negotiations for their own sake, without a clearly defined end goal, are no substitute for a just and lasting peace," Dr. Erekat said.

Netanyahu is due to visit Washington in two weeks, and Obama administration officials have been hoping to get Israel's policy in line with Washington's before then.

Netanyahu will also be visiting Egypt next week to meet with President Hosni Mubarak. Relations between Israel and Egypt have been tense since Netanyahu's cabinet, which includes Avigdor Lieberman as foreign minister, took office. Mr. Lieberman has been told that he is unwelcome in Egypt following insulting language he used in reference to Mr. Mubarak last year.

"Netanyahu is trying to buy time and probably the Palestinians will help him to buy time, because their unity talks are stalling," says Gideon Rahat, an expert in Israeli politics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

"If Netanyahu says tomorrow he supports the two-state solution, what will change? Hamas and Fatah are still divided and so they can't move forward," Mr. Rahat explains. "This is more about a stance, not about real solutions. But obviously, it's important for the Americans and their position in the region. [Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert] was ready for a two-state solution, but I don't think Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority can deliver whatever solutions exist in theory."

"When the Palestinians will be ready for their part, and Netanyahu will say no, then he will be in trouble," says Rahat.



## Biden prods Israel on settlements

May 5, 2009

Vice President Joe Biden prodded Israel on Tuesday to halt the expansion of its settlements on the West Bank, a move he called a necessary step toward ending the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Biden told the annual conference of the influential American Israel Public Affairs Committee that Israel's new prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has "important ideas" about the peace process. But he said, "This is a show-me deal, not based on faith."

Biden said, "Israel has to work toward a two-state solution. You're not going to like my saying this, but not build more settlements, dismantle existing outposts and allow the Palestinians freedom of movement."

Biden's call came as President Obama prepared for a private meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres.

Netanyahu has supported expanding Israeli settlements and has so far avoided any public endorsement of a Palestinian state. His comments have cast doubt on the future of the stalled Israel-Palestinian peace process.

But Peres, whose post is largely ceremonial, told CNN on Monday that Netanyahu has agreed to follow the commitments of previous governments and suggested he was avoiding the reference to avoid friction with partners in his conservative coalition.

"He has to keep them together. He must, like many politicians, do what [ex-U.S. Secretary of State Henry] Kissinger used to call constructive ambiguity," Peres said.

Netanyahu told AIPAC at a Monday evening appearance via satellite that Israel would resume negotiations "without any delay and without any preconditions."

He said Israel would work with friendly Arab governments to improve the Palestinian Authority's capability to crack down on factions that launch attacks on Israelis and help boost economic development in the Palestinian territories that Israel has controlled since the 1967 Mideast war.

"I believe that this triple track toward peace is a realistic path to peace," he said.

But Saeb Erakat, the Palestinian Authority's chief negotiator, said Netanyahu must explicitly endorse the goal of a Palestinian state to demonstrate "that the Palestinians have a partner for peace."

"Without a political settlement, meaning an end to Israel's occupation and the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state, talk of economic peace will be seen for what it is, namely an attempt to normalize and better manage the occupation," Erakat said in response to Netanyahu's speech.

James Rubin, a former State Department official in the Clinton administration, said that Netanyahu's reluctance appeared to be a bargaining tactic.

"He's trying to come over to the United States, meet with President Obama and get something for saying the obvious, what everybody agrees to -- that there needs to be a two-state solution," Rubin said. "He's seeing if he can get something out of America for doing that."



## **Biden Says Israel Must Halt Settlements for Peace**

By Hans Nichols – May 5, 2009

WASHINGTON (Bloomberg) — Vice President Joe Biden called on Israel to work toward a two-state solution with the Palestinians and halt its construction of new settlements. He called on Arab states to respond with “meaningful gestures.”

“Israel has to work towards a two-state solution,” Biden said in an address to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in Washington. “You’re not going to like my saying this, but do not build more settlements. Dismantle existing outposts and allow the Palestinians freedom of movement.”

Biden also told the pro-Israeli lobbying group that the administration is “intensely focused” on preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. If diplomacy fails, the U.S. has “international support to consider other options” to thwart Iran’s ambitions, he said.

President Barack Obama has stepped up pressure on Israel and the Palestinians to accelerate negotiations and last month invited leaders of both sides and Egypt to separate talks in Washington. The president, who is turning attention to foreign policy this week even as his administration continues to grapple with the economic crisis, has endorsed the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

### **Obama, Peres Meeting**

Obama held a closed-door meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres this afternoon at the White House. Afterward, Peres said Israel will “abide by the commitments of the previous government,” referring to the U.S.-backed “road map” to peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, addressing the conference via satellite from Jerusalem, said yesterday that peace talks with the Palestinians will be augmented with steps to improve the economy of the West Bank.

Biden said the administration is looking forward to working with Netanyahu, who he said has some “important ideas” about how to achieve a settlement.

Netanyahu, who took office five weeks ago, outlined his “triple track” approach of pursuing political, security and economic progress for the Palestinians to AIPAC’s annual policy conference in Washington yesterday.

While Netanyahu has stopped short of endorsing Palestinian statehood, Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon said in a May 3 interview that “long-term peace and stability” involves the two-state solution.

### **Arab Commitments**

Arab nations must also increase their commitment to peace negotiations, Biden said.

“Now is the time for Arab states to make meaningful gestures to show the Israel leadership and the people the promise of ending Israel’s isolation in the region is real and genuine,” he said. “They must take action now.”

Biden said that America’s and Israel’s “fate is inextricably tied” and pledged that the drive to bring peace to the region won’t change that relationship.

“With all the change you will hear about, there is one enduring essential principle that will not change,” he said. “And that is our commitment to the peace and security of the state of Israel.”

On Iran, Biden said an Iranian nuclear bomb would spark a destabilizing arms in the region. The U.S. will pursue diplomatic efforts with “the overriding goal of preventing them from getting nuclear weapons,” he said.

Iran has taken a “dangerous role” in the Middle East by supporting groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which the U.S. regards as terrorist organizations, Biden said. They have exploited the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to strengthen their strategic advantage, he said.

# POLITICO

## **Biden: Israel must seek 2-state solution**

By David S. Cloud – May 5, 2009

Vice President Joe Biden called Tuesday for Israel to work toward a two-state solution with the Palestinians and to consider taking steps like freezing settlement activity to improve the climate for negotiations.

Speaking at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual policy conference in Washington, Biden coupled his call for Israeli overtures to the Palestinians with a strong reiteration of support from the Obama administration, which he said viewed Israel's security as "non-negotiable."

He sought to reassure the audience about the Obama administration's policy of seeking engagement with Iran, which has raised fears in Israel and among its supporters in the U.S. that the outreach will give Iran more time to work on achieving a nuclear weapons capability, a goal Tehran denies having.

Biden said the administration realized it "doesn't have unlimited time to make this assessment" about whether its diplomatic outreach to Iran is working, but he was not specific about how long the effort would be allowed to continue.

He emphasized that "nothing is off the table" with Iran, a formulation often used to imply that military action against Iranian nuclear facilities remains possible along with tougher economic sanctions and other steps.

By undertaking its diplomatic overture to Iran, the U.S. will have "greater international support to consider other options," if the effort fails, Biden added.

He received strong applause from the audience of several thousand when he said that Israel had the right "to make its own judgment about what it needs to do to defend itself." Though Biden was not specific about what he meant, Israel has long been thought to be considering a military strike of its own on Iran's nuclear sites.

Biden said that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had "important ideas" about how to advance the peace process.

In remarks to the same conference on Monday, Netanyahu outlined a "triple track" approach to pursuing peace with the Palestinians, emphasizing the need to pursue political, economic and security issues to resolve the decades-long conflict.

Worried that Netanyahu won't move on peace talks with the Palestinians until the threat from Iran is dealt with, Obama administration officials have emphasized the need for Israel to help buttress Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as an alternative to Hamas - a plea that Biden repeated. But he also emphasized that the U.S. expected Arab countries "to do their part" to help Abbas and to reach out to Israel to improve the chances for reaching a peace deal.

"The Arab states should act now, not later," he said.

# THE JERUSALEM POST

## Peres backs Arab League peace initiative

By Hilary Leila Krieger – May 4, 2009

In a message intended for US President Barack Obama, President Shimon Peres on Monday indicated that the Arab League peace plan could serve as a basis for moving the peace process forward.

In a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual conference, Peres stressed that Israel's leaders trusted the US president as he works toward peace, something Israel would pursue as it respected its previous commitments to the Palestinians.

Peres was laying the groundwork for his meeting with the US president on Tuesday, the first official Israeli visit to the Obama White House, which will precede Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's own inaugural trip here by two weeks.

Amid international criticism that Israel's new, predominantly right-wing government will block peace efforts and is on a collision course with the United States, Peres made the opposite point.

Speaking to reporters after his speech, he also stressed that there's "no gap" between the US and Israeli governments.

Yet Israel has emphasized the Iranian threat as the most pressing priority and has been hesitant to endorse the two-state solution for dealing with the Palestinians, even as the Obama administration has been stressing the importance of the peace process and the necessity of creating a Palestinian state.

In a closed meeting with AIPAC's major donors on Sunday night, Obama's chief of staff, Rahm Emmanuel, reportedly said that having negotiations would make it easier to build a regional coalition to stop Iran.

A White House spokesman could not immediately be reached to confirm the comments.

On Monday, Peres stressed that Israel stood behind the US president and his goals.

"Let me make it clear," he declared. "We trust the leadership of President Obama. We trust he will pave the way to both to a regional agreement and meaningful bilateral negotiations. It is a real change in the situation."

Peres characterized the Arab League plan, which offers Israel full recognition in exchange for full withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines and a solution for the Palestinian refugees, as "a serious U-turn."

He said that even though Israel was not a party to its formulation and therefore didn't agree with everything it set out, "Israel respects the profound change. Israel hopes it will be translated into action, the sooner the better."

His comments, delivered before a cheering audience, went further than any official response from the Netanyahu government in embracing the plan, which was first announced in 2002 and has been largely greeted over the years with Israeli skepticism.

The Obama administration, however, has welcomed it as a sign of Arab seriousness in peacemaking, a stance the new American leadership is seeking to encourage in its quest for regional peace.

Peres also said that "Palestinian people have the right to govern themselves," to some applause from the audience, which overall, greeted his speech warmly.

He also defended Netanyahu, his one-time political opponent, as a leader who "wants to make history."

He continued, "In our tradition, making history is making peace. I am sure that peace is his real and profound priority."

He later said, to applause from the thousands of pro-Israel activists in attendance, "In pursuing peace, let's make no mistake: the present government of Israel shall respect commitments made by the previous governments of Israel."

Though some in Israel have expressed concern about the direction of the Obama administration on Israeli-Palestinian policy, particularly that it might recklessly pressure Israel, Peres several times praised the American leader.

Echoing Obama's rallying cries of "hope" and "change" throughout his address, Peres said, "You are young enough to offer hope to the world and great enough to bring it to life."

He also backed Obama's language of outreach to the region, describing his inaugural call for "an outstretched hand instead of a clenched fist" as what was needed.

At the same time, he harshly criticized Iran, one of the countries with which Obama is seeking dialogue.

"The fanatic rulers of Iran are on the wrong side of history," Peres said.

His speech was briefly disrupted by three protesters, including a young woman shouting, "What about the children you killed in Gaza?" and a man who yelled, "End the siege of Gaza!"

Security guards hustled them outside and tried to cover their mouths so that people waiting to enter the convention hall wouldn't hear them. Inside the packed room, the audience rose in an extended standing ovation to drown out their shouts.

Netanyahu, speaking to the convention late Monday night via satellite hook-up, was expected to say that a final peace agreement with the Palestinians would only be possible when they recognize Israel as the national home for the Jewish people.

In addition, Netanyahu was expected to say that Israel would never compromise on its security; that there could be a better future for both Palestinians and Israelis; and that the leaders of Israel, the Arab world, Europe and many other countries know that Iran must not be allowed to gain possession of nuclear weapons.

A night earlier, opposition leader Tzipi Livni of Kadima spoke to AIPAC members in a closed meeting.

According to prepared remarks put out after the session, she, too, stressed the need for peace, but explicitly called for a "two-state solution," a phrase that Netanyahu has been unwilling to articulate.

"Time is not on our side," she warned. "The conflict risks turning from one that is national and resolvable to one that is religious and endless."

She stressed, "I believe that embracing the vision of two states for two peoples - a vision that was recognized by the UN in 1947, and embraced by the United States - is not an Israeli concession but an Israeli interest. This is the only way to end the conflict."

In beginning her speech, Livni noted that it was her first appearance in the US as head of the opposition in Israel.

"Don't worry," she told them, "it is not a role I plan on getting used to!"

But she added that when it came to the issue of Iran, "there is no opposition party in Israel.

"We are all united in our understanding of the threat," Livni declared, "and we will work together with the free world to deny Iran the ability to threaten the region and the world with nuclear weapons or with terror."

Jerusalem Post staff contributed to this report.

# THE JERUSALEM POST

## AIPAC delegates to lobby for two-state solution

By Hilary Leila Krieger – May 4, 2009

While Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is refusing to explicitly endorse a two-state solution to resolve the Palestinian conflict, participants at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee Policy Conference will this week be urging their elected representatives to press President Barack Obama for precisely that.

The pro-Israel advocacy group's annual conference culminates each year with a mass lobbying effort, in which the thousands of participants from across the United States spread out across Capitol Hill for meetings with their respective members of Congress and encourage them to endorse policies and positions that AIPAC believes will advance the American-Israeli interest.

In this year's lobbying effort, to take place on Tuesday, the AIPAC thousands will be asking their congressmen to sign on to a letter addressed to Obama that explicitly posits the need for a "viable Palestinian state."

It is expected that the overwhelming majority of the congressmen will sign it.

Netanyahu has been aware of the letter's content for some time, according to his senior adviser, Ron Dermer.

Dermer said that despite the letter's language, the important issue was that of underlying policy.

"On the substance, I don't think there's a difference in our position and the position of AIPAC," he said.

It is understood that the letter is being advanced despite its discrepancy with the prime minister's stated positions, because its content reflects both longstanding American policy and longstanding AIPAC positions.

The idea is that the letter would form a bridge between US and Israeli views on the diplomatic process at a time when neither country is looking to provoke arguments despite having different perspectives.

Furthermore, it is being noted here that Netanyahu has made plain that his government will honor previous agreements, which include the road map with its specific framework for a path to Palestinian statehood.

It is not known whether Netanyahu will publicly endorse a two-state solution when he meets here on May 18 with Obama, but it is widely assumed that, privately at least, he will make plain to Obama his government's commitment to previous accords.

Several versions of the letter are included in the kits being given out to participants in this week's AIPAC conference.

One version, bearing a "United States Senate" letterhead, addressed to Obama, and left open for signature, states: "We must also continue to insist on the absolute Palestinian commitment to ending terrorist violence and to building the institutions necessary for a viable Palestinian state living side-by-side, in peace with the Jewish state of Israel."

This version also gives explicit support for programs such as the US-supervised training of Palestinian Authority security forces.

"The more capable and responsible Palestinian forces become, the more they demonstrate the ability to govern and to maintain security, the easier it will be for [the Palestinians] to reach an accord with Israel," it states.

"We encourage you to continue programs similar to the promising security assistance and training programs led by Lieutenant-General Keith Dayton, and hope that you will look for other ways to improve Palestinian security and civilian infrastructure."

A second, similar version, also addressed to Obama and signed by staunchly pro-Israel Majority Leader Stony Hoyer and Republican Whip Eric Cantor, sets out a series of "basic principles" that, if adhered to, offer "the best way to achieve future success between Israelis and Palestinians."

Among the principles cited is the requirement for the two parties to directly negotiate the details of any agreement, the imperative for the US government to serve as "both a trusted mediator and a devoted friend to Israel," and the need for Arab states to move toward normal ties with Israel and to support "moderate Palestinians."

The clause that discusses statehood demands "an absolute Palestinian commitment to end violence, terror, and incitement and to build the institutions necessary for a viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace with the Jewish state of Israel inside secure borders."

It continues: "Once terrorists are no longer in control of Gaza and as responsible Palestinian forces become more capable of demonstrating the ability to govern and to maintain security, an accord with Israel will be easier to attain."

A third version of the letter, addressed to their colleagues, is signed by Senators Christopher Dodd, Arlen Specter, Johnny Isakson and John Thune.

It states that "we must redouble our efforts to eliminate support for terrorist violence and strengthen the Palestinian institutions necessary for the creation of a viable Palestinian state living side-by-side, in peace with Israel."

Netanyahu chose not to attend this week's AIPAC conference in part because a Washington visit now would have included, as its central element, talks at the White House with Obama, and Netanyahu preferred to defer that meeting by another two weeks in order to complete his ongoing foreign policy review.

Instead, the prime minister will address the AIPAC delegates by satellite on Monday. Hoyer and Cantor are set to address the same session.

President Shimon Peres is attending the Washington conference in Netanyahu's stead, and will speak on Monday along with Vice President Joseph Biden. Peres will meet with Obama at the White House on Tuesday.

Netanyahu has long indicated that his concerns about Palestinian statehood are practical, rather than ideological - arising from the fear that a fully sovereign Palestinian state might abuse its sovereignty to forge alliances, import arms and build an offensive military capability to threaten Israel.

Aides to the prime minister have also argued in recent days that it is unreasonable to demand that Israel formally endorse statehood for the Palestinian people when the Palestinian leadership is emphatically opposed to recognizing Israel as the state of the Jewish people.

The Hoyer-Cantor letter opens by acknowledging the "formidable" obstacles to peace, but endorses Obama's position "that every effort should be made to try to realize that peace at the soonest possible time."

Jerusalem Post staff contributed to this report.

## Peres tells AIPAC Netanyahu wants to make history with peace

By Natasha Mozgovaya – May 5, 2009

WASHINGTON — President Shimon Peres told an AIPAC conference here yesterday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was ready to forge ahead to make peace with the Arab world.

"Netanyahu knows history and wants to make history. In our tradition, making history is making peace, and I am sure that peace is his priority," Peres told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual conference yesterday.

Speaking ahead of today's meeting with United States President Barack Obama, Peres stressed throughout his speech the message that the Israeli government was committed to previous agreements and to pursuing peace. Netanyahu is due to meet with Obama later this month.

Speaking of negotiations, Peres said: "We shall negotiate with any partner ready to negotiate the peace that has eluded us since 1947. The Saudis gave birth to a peace initiative. Israel wasn't a partner to the wording of this initiative. Therefore it doesn't have to agree to every word. Nevertheless, Israel respects the profound change, and hopes it will be translated into action. In pursuing peace, the present government of Israel shall respect commitments made by the previous one."

He also paid tribute to the new American president.

"A tsunami of hope is rolling across the globe, its center is right here in America," Peres said. "Six months ago you elected a new president of the United States."

"In his inaugural address, President Obama elegantly articulated what is needed, when he called for an outstretched hand instead of a clenched fist," he said. "In the future, our time may be considered as the age of outstretched hands. Israel stands with her arms outstretched, and her hands held open to peace with all nations with all Arab states, with all Arab people."

"Israel's definition of success is not by the military campaigns we have been forced to wage and win, but by the peace we have achieved together with some of our neighbors," Peres said.

The Israeli president dedicated a key portion of his speech to the Iranian crisis.

"The fanatic rulers of Iran are on the wrong side of history. Actually, they are outside of history... Historically, Iran sought to enrich mankind. Today, alas, Iran's rulers enrich uranium," Peres said. "They develop a nuclear option. Iran funds and arms Hezbollah and Hamas to spread division and terror, trying to impose a foreign and violent ideology. Their agents target Americans, Europeans and Arabs alike. Historically, the concern was to separate religion from state. Today, however, the challenge is to disconnect religion from terror."

A number of protesters in the audiences heckled Peres and displayed signs saying "Free Gaza" and "Stop the Occupation," until they were removed by security.

Most of the audience, however, reacted enthusiastically to the speech, frequently stopping Peres with applause.



## **Netanyahu: Ready for peace talks now**

**Speaking via satellite, prime minister tells AIPAC conference he is prepared to resume negotiations with Palestinians immediately. He presents triple-track plan – political, security-related and economic – and says peace is reachable: 'With the help of Obama and Abbas we can surprise the world'**

By Yitzhak Benhorin – May 5, 2009

WASHINGTON — Israel is prepared to resume peace negotiations with the Palestinians without any delay and without any preconditions, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday night, speaking from Israel via satellite to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference.

The prime minister said he believed that "with the help of (US President Barack) Obama and (Palestinian President Mahmoud) Abbas, we can defy the skeptics, we can surprise the world."

Addressing the 6,000 AIPAC conference participants from the Prime Minister's Residence in Jerusalem, Netanyahu delivered a short address with two key messages: Iran must not be allowed to obtain nuclear weapons, and Israel seeks peace with the Palestinians.

The Israeli leader made no reference to the term "Palestinian state", clarified that peace will not come without security, and reiterated that the Palestinians would have to recognize Israel as a Jewish state.

Netanyahu noted in his speech to the pro-Israel lobby that three Israeli prime ministers had failed to reach a final peace accord, but added decisively that he believed "it's possible to achieve (peace)."

He went on to present a new approach: "The fresh approach that I suggest is pursuing a triple track toward peace between Israel and the Palestinians: a political track, a security track and economic track.

"The political track is that we're prepared to resume peace negotiations without any delay and without any preconditions, the sooner the better."

The security track, he said, is continuing talks involving US General Keith Dayton in cooperation with the Jordanians and the Palestinian Authority, in order to bolster Palestinian security forces.

"The economic track means we are prepared to work together to remove as many obstacles as we can to the advancement of the ... Palestinian economy," he said, stating that "we want to work with the Palestinian Authority on this track not as a substitute for negotiations but as a booster."

## **'Peace process Obama's top priority'**

Several hours earlier, Netanyahu addressed what was required from the Palestinian side in a speech at the Knesset in honor of Herzl Day. "The recognition of Israel as the national state of the Jewish people is a necessary basis for true peace between us and our Palestinian neighbors," he said.

Meanwhile, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said Monday night that President Obama plans to advance the peace process. "This is of the utmost priority for the president. It is something that he believes will only be advanced and moved forward by a sustained effort by this administration, in conjunction with the Palestinians and the Israelis, to make progress," he noted.

Gibbs said during the briefing that "this president spent time the very first day he worked in the Oval Office on Middle East peace and I think this is the beginning of many steps. Obviously Mr. Netanyahu will visit the White House later in the month, as others have and others will over the course of the next few weeks as we start this long process."

Reuters and AFP contributed to this report



## **Israel must make decisions, Livni tells AIPAC**

### **Speaking in Washington for first time since assuming role of opposition leader, Kadima chairwoman calls on Arab leaders to advance peace in Middle East, act against Iranian threat. Avoiding tough decisions is the strategic threat on State's future, she tells Israel's leaders**

By Yitzhak Benhorin – May 4, 2009

WASHINGTON — Opposition leader Tzipi Livni addressed the annual conference of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in Washington on Sunday night, clarifying that she supports a tough approach against Iran. She also stressed the importance of the peace process with the Palestinians and cooperating with moderate Arab forces.

If we try to play for time, she said, our problems will worsen and won't become easier. Avoiding tough decisions is the strategic threat on Israel's future, she added.

The Kadima chairwoman noted that her role as opposition leader was to say these things out loud, clearly and in a respectable manner, for the State of Israel. "If we care about the future of our people in our homeland we will all find the courage and the wisdom to make the choices we can no longer afford to avoid," she said.

Speaking for the first time in the United States since assuming the role of opposition leader, Livni said that "on the issue of Iran - there is no opposition party in Israel."

She stressed that Israel was united in understanding the threat and would work together with the free world in order to prevent Iran from obtaining the ability to threaten the region and the world with nuclear weapons or terror.

She stressed, however, the possibility of cooperating with some Arab countries. Leaders' role is to see not only the threats but also the opportunities, she said, adding that the Iranian threat has created new opportunities for alliances between Israel and the region's moderate countries, which have learned that Israel was not the source of trouble in the Middle East.

Today more than ever, she said, the need to confront Iran is being heard in Arabic as well and not just in Hebrew. She added, however, that she would like the Arab voices to be stronger.

#### **'Arab states must confront extremists'**

Livni went on to say that Israel and the Palestinians were not the only ones responsible for taking risks for peace, but that the Arab states must do that as well. She urged them to begin a process which she called "normalization in stages".

According to the opposition leader, the Arab countries must confront the extremists and use the historic Arab peace initiative not as an alternative for negotiations, but as a framework for supporting the Palestinians, who will be forced to deal with painful concessions.

The burden of proof, according to Livni, belongs to the Arab leaders. "We need them to prove to a justly skeptical Israeli public, that peace will offer Israel strategic benefits across the Middle East; and allow Israel to take its rightful place as an integral part of the region.

"I know that some of these pragmatic states claim that we must resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before they can actively join the efforts against the extremists in our region. There are others, including some in Israel, for whom the existence of the threat is an excuse to avoid taking the difficult steps needed to advance coexistence. I do not accept either view."

The former foreign minister argued that advancing peace between Israel and its neighbors was not something the Israelis should be afraid of. We are not doing a favor to the Palestinians or the Arab world or not even to the American administration, she said.

Livni vowed that Israel would remain a Jewish and democratic country forever. Time is not in our favor, she added.

Earlier, the opposition leader met with the White House's chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel. On Monday she is expected to visit the White House for a meeting with National Security Advisor Jim Jones.



## **Obama and Netanyahu administrations listen to each other at AIPAC**

By Ron Kampeas – May 5, 2009

“This relationship matters to me,” one partner says.

“Show me,” says the other.

Such conversations, as any couple can attest, usually don't augur the happiest of chats.

If this year's AIPAC policy conference stopped well short of a full-blown spat between the pro-Israel lobby and the Obama administration, it was because each side was listening to the other: Obama officials listened to Israeli fears about the Iranian nuclear threat, and AIPAC and Israel's prime minister listened to the U.S. administration's insistence on the inevitability of Palestinian statehood.

“Relationships matter” was the motto of this year's American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference, heralded throughout the cavernous Washington Convention Center with billowing banners depicting Israeli and American leaders embracing.

Notably, the shot of President Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu smiling tightly and locked in a stiff handshake was consigned to the center's shadowy corners.

The rejoinder, “Show me,” was Vice President Joe Biden's plea to Israel to facilitate peacemaking through a settlement freeze.

"This is a 'Show me' deal," he said Tuesday, referring also to U.S. demands that the Palestinians quell violence and that neighboring Arab nations support the peace process.

“Israel must work toward a two-state solution,” Biden told the conference on its last day, alluding to Netanyahu's reluctance to utter the “two-state” phrase. Israel must “not build settlements, dismantle outposts and allow Palestinians freedom of movement, access to economic opportunity and increased security responsibilities.”

Biden prefaced his remark by warning delegates, “You won't like this, but ...”

Yet in a sign of the AIPAC crowd's proclivities, Biden's call for a settlement freeze earned measured applause. In fact, as the 7,000 delegates headed for Capitol Hill for a lobbying blitz on Tuesday, one priority was to get members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate to sign letters to Obama encouraging steps toward a “viable Palestinian state living side by side with Israel.”

The letters also back funding for training Palestinian security services -- a hard sell among pro-Israel groups and in Washington as recently as two years ago.

To be sure, the letters also bore skepticism about Palestinian intentions, which has been a hallmark of AIPAC's approach for decades: The House letter called for an "absolute Palestinian commitment to end violence, terror and incitement."

There was also a "Don't shout, the neighbors are going to hear" sort of plea: "The proven best way forward is to work closely and privately together both on areas of agreement and especially on areas of disagreement," said the House letter, initiated by two House leaders and pro-Israel stalwarts, Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), the majority leader, and Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va.), the minority whip.

AIPAC's readiness to deal did not occur in a vacuum. Netanyahu, in a satellite message delivered Monday, backed away from his earlier suggestions that he wanted to focus at first on Palestinian economic development and to place talk of statehood on the back burner.

"We are prepared to resume negotiations without any preconditions," Netanyahu said, describing a "triple-track" approach covering political, security and economic considerations. While he did not make it explicit, "political" talks necessarily would encompass discussions of statehood.

The pledge helped clear the way for Netanyahu to meet with Obama around May 18. The Israeli prime minister originally was to have appeared live at the AIPAC conference, but those plans were scrapped in part because the American and Israeli sides were still working out a way to discuss the two-state issue.

In another concession, Netanyahu repeated Israel's demand that Palestinians should recognize Israel's Jewish character, but said that could be part of a "final peace settlement" and was not a precondition.

The Obama administration, too, showed some flexibility. Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman who has emerged as an Obama administration proxy on Middle East issues, threw in an unscripted "non-militarized" when he called for Palestinian statehood; a demilitarized Palestinian entity is on Netanyahu's wish list of final-status conditions.

More substantially, the speeches by Biden and other leading Democrats emphasized Obama's determination to couple his recent outreach to Iran with tough threats of isolation if it does not end its suspected nuclear weapons program.

"We will approach Iran initially in the spirit of respect," Biden said, but should Iran not meet U.N. requirements to stop enriching uranium, it would face international isolation "in which nothing is taken off the table" -- an allusion to the military option Israel insists on keeping on the table.

Kerry said confronting Iran's expansionist ambitions was a cornerstone of the new administration's strategy, describing three noes that unite Israel, its Arab neighbors and the United States: "No Iranian meddling, no Iranian dominance and above all, no Iranian nukes."

That would allow Obama to impose tough sanctions on third parties that deal with Iran's energy sector. Obama has yet to announce his sanctions strategy, and it's not clear whether he supports proposed bills with far-reaching measures that would cut off U.S. markets to any entity that trades gasoline with Iran.

It was significant, then, that Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), a mentor to the president, told the AIPAC conference he was signing on as a co-sponsor to the Senate sanctions bill.

In the House, where AIPAC exercises its strongest influence, Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.), the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, has said that he will use his prerogative to keep the sanctions bill on hold -- for now. Hoyer said the Obama administration did not have a blank check.

"The administration is pursuing efforts to change behavior," he said, referring to the bill. "We want to make sure that Iran is not misled that talk is a signal that action will not be taken."

Biden and other Democrats gently prodded AIPAC with reminders that its eight-year lockstep love affair with the Bush administration was over.

"The path we have been on in recent years will not result in security and prosperity for Israelis or Palestinians," Biden said.

There seemed to be some nostalgia at the conference for the Bush era, during which many felt the White House was an uncritical friend of Israel.

Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker and a possible Republican candidate for president in 2012, earned huge applause when he called for regime change in Iran -- a major Obama administration no-no -- as well as for military strikes to take out Iran's missiles.

Gingrich also heard cheers when he said that because "the leading funder of Sunni extremism on the planet is Saudi Arabia," that "rather than bow to the king, we need a national energy policy to liberate the United States." It was a reference to right-wing bloggers who claim that Obama bowed when he met Saudi King Abdullah recently; the White House says the president was bending over to shake the king's hand.

Whatever the political preference of AIPAC's grass-roots, the organization's leadership understood that there was a new game in town.

The board announced that a Chicago-based businessman who has become close to Obama, Lee "Rosie" Rosenberg, would be its president-elect. Another Obama funder who recently became the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Alan Solow, appealed to the crowd to embrace a vision of Israel that "can live in peace with its neighbors."

And appearing in Netanyahu's stead, Israeli President Shimon Peres cast a poetic sheen on Obama's election.

"A tsunami of hope is rolling across the globe; its center is right here in America," Peres said. "Six months ago you elected a new president of the United States. President Barack Obama assumed his duties in a period of deep crises in the world. I am convinced he has the capacity to turn the crises into opportunity."



## **Sitting between Bibi and Obama, AIPAC criticized by left and right**

By Ron Kampeas – May 7, 2009

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Days after AIPAC’s apparent success navigating the churning waters between the Obama and Netanyahu administrations, the pro-Israel lobby is being criticized by Jewish groups on both sides of the political spectrum.

Pro-Israel groups on the right and left have assailed the American Israel Public Affairs Committee because of elements of its agenda that emerged from its annual policy conference this week.

The Zionist Organization of America registered a protest about AIPAC’s backing for Palestinian statehood. Meanwhile, three groups that backed the U.S.-sponsored peace process -- Americans for Peace Now, J Street and Brit Tzedek v’Shalom -- rallied supporters to help roll back Tuesday afternoon’s Capitol Hill blitz by 7,000 AIPAC delegates, suggesting the organization had failed to fully endorse Obama’s peace moves.

The AIPAC conference suggested a middle road that could reconcile differences between the two young governments over a key issue -- whether to press toward Palestinian statehood.

The AIPAC delegates’ wish list included endorsements for two congressional letters that unequivocally support a “viable Palestinian state,” albeit with the usual preconditions about an “absolute” end to Palestinian violence.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has tried to maintain ambiguity over his views on a Palestinian state, but such an endorsement for the concept by AIPAC is unlikely to have come without some sort of nod from Jerusalem: Netanyahu addressed the conference via satellite and sent some of his top advisers.

The endorsement of a Palestinian state by the pro-Israel lobby now may spare Netanyahu from having to explicitly endorse the concept himself -- and elicit the opprobrium of his coalition’s pro-settler flank -- when he meets with President Obama in two weeks.

Good save, Israel-side, but it upset the ZOA -- the most prominent American group opposing a Palestinian state -- stateside.

In a statement, the ZOA said it “opposes this move by AIPAC because supporting or promoting a Palestinian Arab state under prevailing conditions is seriously mistaken and because AIPAC is thereby supporting a major policy affecting Israel’s vital interests despite the fact that the Israeli government has not supported such a policy.”

The three groups from the left taking shots across AIPAC’s bow have never had a problem differing with Israeli policy. What was unclear was where they substantively disagreed with AIPAC, at least on the Palestinian front.

Americans for Peace Now encouraged activists to call lawmakers and make the following four points: “I am pro-Israel, and I want you to support the Obama administration’s peace efforts in the Middle East”; “I am pro-Israel,

and I want you to support the president's request for supplemental assistance for the Palestinians"; "I am pro Israel, and I want you to support the president's effort to open the window for responsible engagement with a Palestinian unity government"; and "I am pro-Israel, and I want you to reject efforts to promote new Iran sanctions legislation, or efforts to impose any artificial deadlines for ending diplomacy with Iran."

The e-mail blast also stated that AIPAC's "agenda is often not the same as ours." Action alerts from Brit Tzedek v'Shalom and J Street to their followers did not explicitly target AIPAC but similarly urged backing for Obama's peace principles the very week that AIPAC delegates were making their case in Washington.

Yet the congressional letters backed by AIPAC back the first two principles in the Peace Now alert -- Obama's initiative and supplemental assistance.

On the third issue, JTA has learned that AIPAC has signed off quietly on a policy that would involve the United States engaging with a Palestinian national unity government that included individuals approved by Hamas, as long as those individuals explicitly committed to the three principles Hamas abjures: an end to terrorism, recognition of Israel and an agreement to abide by earlier peace agreements. That more or less aligns with the policies outlined in recent week by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

On the fourth issue, Iran sanctions, it is true that AIPAC strongly backs the tough sanctions legislation opposed by the three left-wing groups.

An official for one of the three groups acknowledged -- and welcomed -- AIPAC's endorsement of the Obama administration's Israeli-Palestinian peace initiatives. The official said he now saw the difference as more one of emphasis, arguing that the three groups' endorsement of support for the Palestinian Authority was much more aggressive.

Another pro-Israel official, close to AIPAC, said attacks from the right and the left affirmed the group's place in the mainstream.

It's not the first time AIPAC has taken hits from its right and left, although the coincidence of the attacks is unusual. In 2007, Sheldon Adelson, the casino magnate and a major AIPAC donor, threatened to cut off the group for backing a letter to the Bush administration urging it to increase funding for the Palestinian Authority. Dovish groups targeted AIPAC the year before for backing the tough restrictions on aid written into the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act.

## **L.A. brings its clout to AIPAC**

By Hillel Kuttler – May 5, 2009

David Yahudian endured embarrassment and fear growing up in Teheran. On walks in the market, his father ordered him to tuck the Magen David necklace inside his shirt and—even worse—called him by an alias, Ali, rather than by his overtly Jewish name. Following an Israel-Iran soccer match at the 1974 Asia Games, he saw fans burning Israeli flags in the parking lot.

Little in his native Iran has changed, said Yahudian, who was in Washington, D.C., on Monday. Last summer, the principal of a public high school summoned students to the courtyard for the anti-Israel commemoration known as Jerusalem Day. She taunted the school's lone Jew to demonstrate animosity toward Israel by dousing a proffered Israeli flag in kerosene and lighting it. Intimidated in public, the boy, Yahudian's 16-year-old nephew, Jacob, obeyed.

As much to exercise the freedoms he's enjoyed in the United States for the past 30 years as to support Israel, Yahudian closed his shop in L.A.'s Jewelry District to attend this week's annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Policy Conference in Washington.

He was hardly alone. California reportedly brought 1,300 attendees, the largest delegation of any state. Southern Californians were noticeable throughout the corridors of the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. They came with large synagogue groups, campus organizations, Jewish outreach centers and on their own—although, even then, many in the last group brought along children, grandchildren and friends.

On Sunday, L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa delivered the keynote speech at a session where Rep. Jane Harman (D-Venice) and Rep. Dennis Cardoza (D-Merced) also spoke and where Milken Community High School senior Samson Schatz introduced the AIPAC board.

And, perhaps the best tribute of all: On Tuesday, traditionally the morning when attendees lobby their members of Congress, Capitol Hill instead came to the state group, with one forum at the convention center featuring Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, followed by another with Reps. Harman, Brad Sherman (D-Sherman Oaks), Henry Waxman (D-Los Angeles) and Adam Schiff (D-Pasadena).

Indeed, a Monday morning session was titled, "Why L.A. Matters: The Intersections of Politics and Lobbying."

AIPAC spokesman Josh Block called the large, visible L.A. contingent "a real testament to the strength and diversity of the pro-Israel community—to not only have so many activists from Southern California, but also to have Mayor Villaraigosa give such a stirring address."

Attendees offered several explanations for the strong Los Angeles presence. Some felt a need to become activists against the threat of an imminently nuclear-capable Iran. Others pointed to the condemnation of the Israel Defense Forces' war last winter to halt Palestinian rocket fire from Gaza.

Even more lauded the recruitment efforts undertaken by rabbis representing a wide range of L.A. synagogues to bring people here. They spoke, too, of the role of synagogues' Israel committees and of individual congregants in

encouraging friends and relatives to attend. Some mentioned a desire to gauge the possible effect on the America-Israel relationship of the recent ascensions to power of President Barack Obama and of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

All said that they'd come to learn, in-depth, about the array of Israel-related geo-political issues both in conference sessions and in informal discussions with fellow delegates.

Several participants said that coming to Washington helped equip them with the information and strategy needed to discuss the issues effectively back home. Schatz said he learned the importance of sticking with a uniform, pro-Israel message to jar supporters he knows who are apathetic and to respond to detractors.

For example, he said, "there should be no discussion" about the legitimacy of Iran's gaining a nuclear capability. For another: using what he called the "retail engagement" method of calmly debating topics one-on-one rather than responding publicly to provocative protestors. Schatz said he learned that method here and at two previous AIPAC seminars he's attended in Washington over the past year.

No one mentioned the recession as a factor in spurring their own participation or in keeping potential delegates away.

"L.A. is such a large Jewish community that we should be bringing such a large delegation," Schatz said. "We have schools and leaders who are telling us to go, and we have the love for Israel. There's a great number of involved people. The [Israeli] consul general is very involved."

Large? How about the approximately 200 members of Sinai Temple, more than 100 each from Valley Beth Shalom and Stephen S. Wise Temple, and 40 each from Temple Beth Am and Shomrei Torah Synagogue in West Hills, which Yahudian attends?

The Jewish outreach group Aish L.A. brought 40 college students and young professionals here, the third straight year it has arranged a group.

Rabbi David Sorani, director of the graduate student division, said that Aish draws young people to Judaism by appealing to their interests and activities.

"When they get back from AIPAC, we try to get them involved in the Jewish community and Israel," Sorani explained before an Aish L.A. side meeting here Monday.

"It's been very successful because some students have gone to Israel rallies, gotten involved in other organizations and felt more proud to be associated with Israel. Students will feel that they can stand up to the Palestinians and wear an Israeli T-shirt.... When you have 7,000 people here, it makes you feel supported by the community at large."

Yoni Dror, an 11th-grader at Mesivta Birkat Yitzchak, mentioned his rabbi's custom, following Shacharit services, of informing students of overnight news from Israel, even updating the pre-election poll numbers.

Yoni believes he is the first from his school to attend the AIPAC conference. His father Brian, an accountant in the Fairfax District, also an AIPAC first-timer, said that he came, too, because an AIPAC speaker at Birkat Yitzchak had persuaded Yoni to travel to Washington.

No single issue on the pro-Israel agenda motivates Brian now: not the Iranian threat, terrorism or Hamas' role in Palestinian politics. "I don't think these issues are unique to Israel," he said.

“Every one of the issues facing Israel’s security is an issue facing, or that will face, the United States. I challenge anyone who feels that Iran or terrorism is a uniquely Israel problem to learn the facts and learn the issues.”

Asked what he came to learn this week, Brian said, “It’s the political change in both countries — trying to get a handle on what we can do to help.” He added, “I feel that our time, effort and money are my contribution to ensuring Israel’s safety. Thank God the state exists [and] has a good economy; the only thing left is to ensure its security.”

Bringing young Angelenos to the AIPAC conference is an important way for Adam Milstein to support both Israel and Judaism. The Encino commercial real estate developer and his wife, Hila, natives of Haifa, assumed the cost of bringing 150 people here. That includes the Aish L.A. contingent along with groups from StandWithUs, Hillel, AIPAC’s regional group and the Jewish Awareness Movement.

The investment “is a no-brainer,” he said.

“I am a charitable person. My focus is the students. Now is the time to get them educated and involved. The kids are so energetic. They want to be active; they want to create.... I want them to bring their parents. [Parents] listen to the kids. Through the kids, we can reach more people,” Milstein said.

Milstein also has partnered with AIPAC to reach out to non-Jewish college student leaders. Each year since 2006, the couple has sent 50 such students on AIPAC’s Allied Campus Mission to Israel. “We’re getting excellent results from our investment,” he said. “As a businessman, every investment we make, we want to see the highest return. Every dollar we spend, we get huge results.”

The Milsteins’ involvement with AIPAC began modestly. They came to the conference five years ago because they wanted to spur college activism on Israel by their two elder daughters, Wendy and Leerone. Each girl brought a friend. At the 2004 conference’s banquet, Leerone sat next to another Los Angeles participant. The two hit it off. They were married in 2006.

Yahudian, the jeweler, also has his teenage daughter, Hannah, in mind for AIPAC. He was so impressed by his initial experience here that he registered at a kiosk for next year’s conference.

He plans to bring his wife and daughter, too, and will raise the idea upon his return to Los Angeles.

Yahudian also is working on some Christian clients in Mississippi whom he knows from trade shows in New Orleans. Already, he said, a preacher there said that he hopes to bring 40 congregants on their first trip to Israel.

“I have to go home and promote [the conference] to family and friends, to see how many I can bring here,” he said. “As I tell my friends: If you love Israel, this [event] is the perfect place to be.”

## **AIPAC Conference Brings 1,000 Students to Washington**

By Yonit Tanenbaum – May 6, 2009

Among the more than 6,500 people who flocked to Washington, D.C., this week to attend the annual Policy Conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee were more than 1,000 college students, who on the first day of the gathering, had their own reception on the balcony of the Washington Convention Center.

Picking at a dessert buffet composed of chocolate-covered strawberries, carrot-cake muffins, cookies and coffee, the students – representing some 325 campuses from all of the 50 United States, plus the District of Columbia – milled around a string of booths, including those set up by the Chabad on Campus International Foundation, Hillel, and the historically-Jewish Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity.

And while the explicit aim of the conference was to jumpstart this year's grassroots lobbying efforts on behalf of Israel in the corridors of the U.S. Congress, the student reception was also designed to foster a greater connection to the biblical Land of Israel among Jewish students, many of whom have never been to the Holy Land. The Chabad on Campus booth was co-sponsored by American Friends of Lubavitch and staffed by several campus-based Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries.

“Chabad instills a warmth and enthusiasm for Judaism,” said Miriam Malnik, who graduated from Howard Community College in Maryland with a nursing degree. “AIPAC, [in turn], strengthens students to be advocates for Israel.”

According to Rabbi Yudi Steiner, the new director of the Chabad House serving George Washington University, the event was an opportunity for students to become familiar with what Chabad Houses have to offer on their campuses, particularly in the realm of Israel-related activities. Chabad Houses are among the most active recruiters of free Taglit-birthright Israel trips to the Holy Land provided by Mayanot, and Chabad on Campus runs Israelinks, an advanced educational experience for birthright alumni.

“This presented a prime opportunity to engage our people's future leaders and explore ways in which all segments of Jewish activism can reach out to the uninitiated,” said Steiner, “inspiring them to discover their own heritage.”

For Michael David, an information technology major at California State University Channel Islands, the entire conference left him better prepared to deal with anti-Israel viewpoints at his school.

“I plan to bring Israel awareness and advocacy to my campus,” said David. “I want to get Israel out in front, so people know the truth.”

### **Students Take to the Hill**

The Sunday night reception followed general sessions featuring presentations from former Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich to Democratic Rep. Jane Harman of California. Gingrich rattled the foreign policy establishment when he warned of shifting American attitudes that could put Israel in danger, while Harman participated in a panel discussion with former CIA director James Woolsey; Robert Satloff, executive director of

the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; and Israel Air Force commander Maj. Gen. Ido Nechustan, on foreign policy challenges facing the U.S., Israel and the rest of the world.

“They each shared their perspectives on what the situation is, and also presented their prospects on future change,” said Saul Zebovitz, a Jewish Studies major at Dartmouth College.

“It’s scary,” reflected Shuli Rosenberg, a political science major at Yeshiva University. “The nuclear threat in Iran is imminent and very real. We, as Americans, need to get involved because [radical Islamists] are against all humanity, not just Israel.”

The students joined their professional counterparts on Tuesday in a mass lobbying drive on Capitol Hill. Among the legislative priorities was passage of the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act, which calls for economic penalties against the country.

At the reception, Rabbi Yossy Gordon, executive vice president of Chabad on Campus, said that many Jewish students have a visceral connection to Israel that can jump start an exploration of their own religious heritage.

Said Gordon: “It’s imperative that students nurture their connections to the Land of Israel.”



## Where's the SGA President? AIPAC

By Elizabeth Redden – May 5, 2009

WASHINGTON — The theme of this year's American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Policy Conference is "relationships matter" -- the significance of which should not be lost on the 193 student government presidents the lobbying group brought here for the occasion, as Jonathan Kessler, AIPAC's leadership development director, told them Saturday. "Every conversation, every relationship starts somewhere."

Including the relationship with AIPAC, of course. In the wake of the war in Gaza this winter came a surge in pro-Palestinian or anti-Israel activism on campuses, but AIPAC, which calls itself "America's Pro-Israel Lobby," has in recent years attempted to broaden its own base of support on campus, to incorporate not only the passionate pro-Israel advocates but "mainstream student leaders," as well. The organization has been paying the way for student government association presidents to come to its conference for several years now, and this year had its largest group attend, despite the conflict with final exams on many campuses.

"AIPAC is committed to maintaining and strengthening the U.S.-Israel relationship and we don't take the future for granted," Kessler said in an interview. "For 30 years we've looked to identify and engage and educate the next generation of American policy makers."

"You can really start something by just reaching key people," said Jason Lifton, who's newly elected to the student government at George Washington University. "I think it's important that you reach the biggest mouths on campus."

Lifton has also been involved with pro-Israel advocacy more generally, but for many if not most of the student government presidents gathered this week by AIPAC, that's not been the case. While AIPAC didn't ask the students about their faith traditions, the sense, Kessler said, is that the vast majority of student government officers in attendance are not Jewish. Among those institutions well-represented are historically black colleges and universities and Christian colleges.

"They want to do this because the student body presidents are influential on their campus and in the community," said Leigha Caron, the outgoing student government president at Dallas Baptist University. "This allows them to bring some of the influential people and educate them about what AIPAC is and what they stand for. Because most of us would never know what AIPAC is unless we had this opportunity to attend."

"To really understand what the issues are is something I would never have experienced had it not been for this," said John Graves, the Student Senate President at St. Catharine College, in Kentucky. "It's more than just a free trip to D.C."

Of course, the broker of knowledge here is not an especially unbiased one, and AIPAC as an organization has been subject to increasing scrutiny in recent years, including within the Jewish community -- in part because of all the power it has accrued. "Inside the Beltway the lobby has been wildly successful at keeping policy makers and prominent individuals from criticizing Israeli policy. But academia is one place where they've had a lot of trouble," said John J. Mearsheimer, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago and author of *The*

Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), a controversial 2007 book critical of the extent of the Israel lobby's influence.

"The specific game, of course, is to co-opt these individuals early in their life so they are exceedingly pro-Israel over time and very reluctant to criticize Israel or the special relationship," Mearsheimer said.

"That's the goal: to 'educate' them. Please put the word 'educate' in quotes. The name of the game here is to 'educate' these important student leaders to understand Israel's position on the various controversial issues of the Middle East."

J Street, a one-year-old player in the pro-Israel lobbying world that's been depicted in the New York Times as the "un-AIPAC," last month announced its own outreach to college students. J Street (which calls itself "pro-Israel, pro-peace") is folding the campus-based Union of Progressive Zionists under its umbrella. Organizers largely declined to contrast their student outreach strategy with that of AIPAC's but said they're filling a niche that other pro-Israel advocacy organizations on campus (and there are many -- not just AIPAC) haven't.

"What we've seen a lot on campus is the very far right and the very far left. ... Israel can do no wrong and Israel can do no right," said Tamara Shapiro, director of the Union of Progressive Zionists. "We are offering a space to provide a different perspective on what it means to be pro-Israel. There isn't really a space on campus to talk about pushing for effective Middle East diplomacy, there isn't really a space to talk about how to approach Israel when you have concerns with some of Israel's policies."

Kessler, of AIPAC, described the policy conference in big-tent terms, featuring high-profile Democrats and Republicans and offering an intensive, three-day graduate curriculum of sorts on Middle Eastern policy, with "a full array of speakers representing a full array of opinions. ... If anything, I'm exposing students to a widespread sentiment and not by any means a narrow or parochial sentiment," Kessler said.

"It's been really important to my education," said Daniel McClure, a University of Central Oklahoma student who, as president of the statewide student government, recruited other student leaders from his state to come to this year's AIPAC conference, which ends today. "You can soak it up, if it's meaningful to you, pass it on" -- as he has -- "if not, thanks for coming."