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Author(s): Thomas A. Dine

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The Revolution in U.S.-Israel Relations

Thomas A. Dine

The following is the text of the speech given by Thomas A. Dine, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), on 6 April 1986 to the 27th Annual AIPAC Policy Conference. The text of the speech is reproduced in full. Only brief introductory remarks have been omitted.

. . . This is—again—a tremendous turnout for AIPAC's annual Policy Conference. What a thrill it is to see so many in attendance—of all generations. From around the country have come our top chieftains: state chairpersons, congressional caucus leaders, key contacts, leaders on so many local fronts, on so many issues of concern to us as American citizens.

And if you want to get a glimpse into the 21st century, look around you. The more than 500 students are high schoolers and collegiates.

They have come from a variety of places like Utah and Iowa, Kansas and Alabama, Vermont and Arizona—and New York. This is the largest number of students ever assembled at an AIPAC policy conference!

As we march into the 1990s and beyond, these young people will be marching with us! They are the vanguard, the van-

guard of a new generation that appreciates the imperative for political involvement, and for political activism. AIPAC students match their passion with their political acumen. They are literally transforming their campus environments. And, in time, they will transform the political landscape of this nation. On the college campuses of America, AIPAC has seen the future—and it works!

Jews and Christians, young and old, white and black, liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, energetic and enthusiastic and responsible citizens, we are here on behalf of our common cause—to expand, to deepen, to enhance the partnership between Washington and Jerusalem.

The theme of this conference is “People made the difference in policy and politics.”

Each of you gives our cause strength.

You are the heart of AIPAC. Together we are strong. Each one of us needs each other.

And nowhere is this more clearly expressed than in the Congress of the United States.

Congress functions both as a forum through which public opinion is brought to bear upon the whole federal government and as a medium for gathering and disseminating information for the enlightenment of the people. Capitol Hill is the repository of our democratic principles. It is in Congress that laws are made and national policy codified. No one appreciates these facts more than those of us in this room tonight—AIPAC's members and staff.

The barometer by which one measures Israel's standing among the people of America is by what takes place on Capitol Hill. Here U.S. support for Israel is built, maintained, and advanced. Congress is the bedrock of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Just a year ago I stood before you and laid out a legislative agenda that some said was too ambitious. I am here tonight to report that we have met or exceeded every one of our goals.

Congress in 1985 passed—and the president signed into law—the first foreign aid bill since 1981. Despite the budget cutting mood here in Washington, the legislation contained the most generous Israel aid package ever: \$3 billion in regular aid plus an additional \$1.5 billion in emergency economic aid. All the funds are grants. The \$3 billion in aid represents an increase of \$400 million above the previous fiscal year and a doubling of grant assistance since 1983.

When Senator Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) took the aid authorization bill to the Senate floor as the new chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations—and he is there thanks to the defeat of Charles Percy—he wanted to plant the bill firmly into the most solid political foundation

possible. He began with something easy for his colleagues to vote on—one and a half billion dollars in emergency economic aid for Israel. The amendment passed unanimously! There could be no better indicator of support for Israel than that.

Senator Lugar's tactic of starting with Israel acknowledges that aid to Israel is the locomotive that powers the whole foreign aid train through the legislative process. It was a signal also to the administration that foreign aid passes largely because of support for aid to Israel, and that Israel is a congressional priority.

But there was more, much more, in that landmark legislation by the time it reached the president's desk:

—Funding was assured for Israel's Lavi aircraft project, Israel's fighter for the 1990s.

—The United States will no longer pay the bills for United Nations programs which benefit the PLO.

—And funding was increased for a unique cooperative program that combines American aid with Israeli know-how to help developing nations.

—Four strong messages for the peace process were contained in that legislation as well:

- First, the Egyptians were put on notice that America's generous aid to that country is linked to its performance in sustaining its peace treaty with Israel.

- To Jordan, Congress said it wanted to see a tangible commitment to a peace process, not just more rhetoric, before a major arms transfer would even be considered.

- For the Saudis, Congress has now legislated that they must contribute substantially to the peace process before the AWACS sold in 1981 can be delivered later this year. We will be taking a much closer look at that issue in the weeks ahead as the Congress begins probing it in depth.

● And to those in the State Department who were anxious to bring Yasir Arafat to the peace table (instead of the docket where he belongs), Congress barred all U.S. officials from direct contact with the PLO unless it publicly accepts UN Resolutions 242 and 338, recognizes Israel's right to exist, and renounces terrorism.

This year we will be lobbying for another grant of \$3 billion in aid for Israel, as recommended by the Reagan administration in the Gramm-Rudman environment.

The generous scope and consistently supportive provisions of U.S. aid for Israel, especially during this period of deficit reduction, reflect the widely held belief, both in Congress and in the administration, that a strong, economically stable Israel is in the highest interest of the United States.

That is also why the Congress approved the final Free Trade Area agreement and implementing legislation by an overwhelming 422 to 0 vote in the House and by unanimous voice vote in the Senate.

And just a few weeks ago, after thirty-seven years of delay, the Senate finally gave its advice and consent to the Genocide Convention, a treaty the government in Israel ratified in 1950.

But the real story of last year was one that each of you was personally involved in. I want to pay special tribute tonight to you, to Congress, and to our guest speakers tomorrow night and Tuesday morning, senators Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) and John Heinz (R-Pa.) and Congressman Larry Smith (D-Fla.). Together, you blocked the Jordan arms sale! Together, you set the pursuit of peace above the sale of arms as this nation's priority.

The message was loud and clear: First send in the peace makers, not the arms merchants. As Senator Heinz put it, "Selling advanced weapons prior to direct ne-

gotiations between Israel and Jordan is premature and unwarranted."

Our strategy, frankly, was to convince the administration not to push for the arms sale until King Hussein had taken an irrevocable step toward peace. Our goal was to see him seated across the negotiating table from the prime minister of Israel. If we have learned anything it is that arms sales to Israel's enemies are no incentive for peace. On the contrary, when we have withheld weapons, as we did with Egypt in the mid-1970s, we witnessed progress toward reconciliation. This was clearly the view of overwhelming majorities in both parties and both houses of the Congress.

Nonetheless, despite all the warnings, the administration sent its \$2 billion jets-and-missiles package for Jordan to Capitol Hill on 21 October. Twenty-four hours later nearly three-quarters of the U.S. Senate introduced a resolution to disapprove that arms sale. This was followed a few days afterward by a 97-to-1 vote in the Senate (and later unanimously in the House) shelving the sale for another 100 days or until "direct and meaningful peace negotiations between Israel and Jordan are underway." As the 1 March 1986 deadline for action approached, as congressional opposition continued to grow and was strong enough to override the president's veto, with still no sign of progress in getting King Hussein to the table, the administration reluctantly announced it was indefinitely postponing its arms proposal.

This did not happen by accident. It came about because you and thousands more like you all around this country worked very hard. You spoke and wrote and phoned, and visited your representatives and senators. You let them know clearly how you felt about selling advanced fighter jets and missiles to a country still at war with Israel which shares her longest hostile border. Your message, in the words

of one congressman, was "no peace, no planes"!

By withdrawing the arms package, even the administration conceded that there had been no progress on the peace front. Even King Hussein acknowledged this when he finally blamed the breakdown of his peace initiative on Yasir Arafat.

You shaped the debate by demanding that major arms sales be predicated on a viable peace process. You articulated your views in an effective manner to your elected officials. That is the essence of the democratic process, and it is the essence of AIPAC. It is the essence of America. That is what you are all about. You made the decided difference. I salute you.

In reviewing this record, it is clear that we have grounds for great satisfaction. We have succeeded in building extraordinary support for Israel in Congress.

But I want to use this annual occasion to do more than just list our achievements. As executive director, I want to take the opportunity to delve more deeply into the issues before us as an organization.

This year, we meet at a time when the community is seized with a controversial issue concerning the executive branch. The question is, when Israel is increasingly dependent upon the United States, how do we strike the right balance in our policy toward the executive branch? Our goals depend very much on the decisions that the president and his top officials make toward Israel specifically and the Middle East generally. In these areas, a close and consultative relationship between our community and the administration is a mainstay of U.S.-Israel relations.

Yet there are, inevitably, other policy issues on which we are destined to disagree with this or any other administration. In some cases, once in a while, administrations are just plain wrong! Or, to be a little more charitable about it, in some cases they are trying to solve a different problem

with another country, but their actions, while not *intended* to harm Israel, have the effect of eroding Israel's narrow margin of security.

We are the watchdogs of one key issue, the U.S.-Israel partnership. In some cases, we oppose administration policy, particularly if it threatens Israel, even if this opposition strains our relations with the president.

But we know there is a tension between these two aspects of our work, and there is a dilemma of when to work *with* and when to work *against* this or any administration. We also know that every choice has a price. If we are working *with* an administration to achieve vital goals, we pay a price in not facing down some policies which are adverse but are in areas of lesser importance.

In the past, when we have been forced to mobilize opposition because an administration has embarked on a course that threatens damage to the Jewish state and to the higher interests of the United States, we have done so with the realization that, inevitably, we are also thereby damaging our other goals.

There is no painless, cost-free way to make the policy choices we at AIPAC must make. What we have to do is weigh carefully the *costs* and *benefits* of the alternatives before us. We try to make choices on the basis of a clear vision of our immediate and ultimate goals, and a clear strategy for achieving them.

When we make these decisions we must always be aware of the responsibilities we bear for the future of the bilateral relationship, and the future of the Jewish people. Israel may be strong today. But its enemies are *also* stronger than they have ever been. The enormous investment in arms that the Arabs undertook in the 1970s is now reaching maturity. Arab radicalism and Islamic fundamentalism are on the loose. Those few in the Arab world who advo-

cated peace are either cowering in fear or dead.

We sense, deep in our hearts, that a very dark hour may visit us again, that an extreme threat may rush, perhaps with little warning, to Israel's door. When this storm does come, what we in this room have done and not done will be judged, not by the passing standards of the moment, but by the unforgiving measure of how choices made today affect the ability of the Jewish state to survive that future danger.

With this ultimate criterion in mind, let me review where we are, and explain to you the choices we have made and are making.

To put it simply, the relationship today between the United States and Israel is excellent. This relationship has entered a revolutionary era. We are no longer talking about a transformation in the relationship, we are talking about a revolution. The old order in which Israel was regarded as a liability, a hindrance to America's relationship with the Arab world, a loud and naughty child—that order has crumbled. In its place, a new relationship is being built, one in which Israel is treated as—and acts as—an ally, not just a friend, an asset rather than a liability, a mature and capable partner, not some vassal state.

This administration, this Congress, and this community—together with Israel—are engaged in changing the entire basis of U.S.-Israel relations. And I submit to you, these changes in the strategic, economic, and diplomatic spheres will be felt for decades to come.

Many of these changes are occurring slowly and undramatically, in ways that hardly appear in the press, so let me give you a few signposts.

Let us begin with strategic cooperation. It is hard to believe that barely two years have passed since the American president and the Israeli prime minister announced

that the two countries would embark on joint military planning, joint exercises, and prepositioning of military equipment in Israel. But, at President Reagan's initiative and in pursuit of his vision, Israel is now being treated as an ally. What were mere words at the outset of Ronald Reagan's presidency have now been translated into tangible actions undertaken by both countries in pursuit of their common interests as fighting democracies. Meetings of the U.S.-Israel Joint Political Military Group are now a matter of routine; joint military maneuvers and medical training exercises occur on a regular basis; U.S. Navy fighter pilots of our Sixth Fleet now train at Israeli bombing ranges in the Negev desert; visits by the Sixth Fleet to Haifa have quietly taken on the dimensions of a minor invasion, including the visit to Israel last year of some 30,000 American sailors.

This relationship is vital to the future of Israel, for several reasons. *First*, to have the United States standing beside Israel in this way sends a strong deterrent signal to radical forces in the Arab world, and to the Soviet Union. It tells them that any thought they might have had about driving a wedge between the U.S. and Israel, about isolating the Jewish state in order to destroy it, is foreclosed.

Second, strategic cooperation is improving Israel's access to the most advanced American technologies, and these will contribute significantly to Israel's defense. When "the few" fight against "the many," the small band must rely on qualitative advantages to offset the enemy's enormous quantitative superiority. Advanced technologies therefore are the very heart of Israel's security requirements. Here, as elsewhere, Israel is afforded the same treatment as America's other allies in Europe, Japan, Canada, and Australia. And this is being done not merely as some favor to Israel but because Israel's brainpower has

much to contribute to the development of technological breakthroughs in the area of defense.

Third, the president has declared that the U.S. will consider the use of Israeli facilities to stockpile U.S. defense items for joint use in preparation for a possible emergency in the region. Prepositioning will strengthen the ability of U.S. forces to maintain security there, while also providing Israel with an additional stockpile to draw upon in a crisis.

Fourth, the U.S. is stepping up dramatically its own purchases of defense goods and services from Israeli firms. This, too, helps to reduce the burden of Israel's defense, by increasing production runs and reducing unit costs of defense items. And, of course, it strengthens America's defense by providing it with effective weapons at lower cost.

The whole story of this revolution in strategic cooperation cannot yet be told, because many of the most important steps are in an embryonic stage and both countries feel that greater progress can be achieved without an undue burden of publicity. Let me, however, share with you what Secretary of State George Shultz recently explained. He said the point of strategic cooperation is, and I quote, "to build institutional arrangements so that eight years from now, if there is a secretary of state who is not positive about Israel, he will not be able to overcome the bureaucratic relationship between Israel and the U.S. that we have established." Think about that. For a secretary of state to feel that way—think about how far we have come.

And on the question of defending Israel, the secretary of state forecasted, "Eight years from now, discussions about Israel's security will be different. They will be about the highest, state-of-the-art weapons technology and how Israel is taking advan-

tage of that technology. That is how we are going to secure Israel."

So I can only reemphasize: we are in the middle of a revolution in the area of strategic cooperation, and this president and this secretary of state are going to leave a legacy that will be important to Israel's security for decades to come.

A similar process is taking place in the economic arena. With the Free Trade Area as a permanent basis for future trade relations between the two countries, Israel is the only country in the world to have across-the-board, two-way, duty-free trade relations with the United States of America, the world's largest market. Since Israel is also an associate in the European Common Market, it is in the unique position of being the one place on the entire globe where you can locate a factory to export freely to both the United States and Europe without tariffs. The benefits of this revolutionary change will take some years to materialize fully. This treaty will have an enormous effect on Israel's export opportunities for the rest of our lives.

But this is only one of the revolutionary changes in the economic sphere that the Reagan administration has wrought. In 1983, as you know, the president ended the practice of giving Israel a mixture of grants and loans, and shifted instead to an all-grant basis for aid. If you were following the alarming rate at which Israel's debt burden was increasing, you can understand that this decision to cap the debt burden and end its growth is vital to the process of Israeli economic recovery.

This president, and especially this secretary of state, have also played an important role in helping Israel to stop the galloping inflation that was raging at 800 percent per year, an achievement that no other democracy has ever scored in so short a period. At the same time, they helped Israel survive a foreign exchange crisis by recommending to the Congress a

multi-billion dollar special appropriation over the past few years. And beyond this, Secretary of State George Shultz is playing a unique role in providing excellent economic advice and personal support for renewed economic development in Israel. Israel was, very frankly, hemorrhaging economically the last time we met. Today, the painful cuts are being felt, but she is getting back on her feet. Credit goes to the government and people of Israel. But it also must go to the U.S. Congress and the administration, and particularly Secretary of State George Shultz, for helping the recovery, and for helping create a strong economic future for the Jewish state.

We also see the revolution in the diplomatic sphere. The State Department used to define success in the peace process in terms of how much pressure the U.S. was bringing to bear on Israel to make concessions. Now, Israel is treated as a partner in the peace process. Cooperation on the strategic level is complemented by coordination on the diplomatic level. The United States now only moves on the peace process after the closest consultation with the government of Israel. Trust, the most crucial ingredient in any negotiation, has been established in the diplomatic discourse between the United States and Israel.

Moreover, in its public diplomacy, this administration has demonstrated unprecedented support for the sometimes controversial actions Israel is forced to take. The understanding expressed by the White House of Israel's retaliation against PLO headquarters in Tunis is but the most recent example of this phenomenon. At the United Nations, the United States has now gone beyond defending Israel to actively opposing and undermining the anti-Israel efforts of the Arabs. On the other hand, only Israel supported President Reagan's actions in the Gulf of Sidra,

while our Arab "friends" condemned American actions.

In the interest of time I will close this review here. We are in the midst of a revolution that is raising U.S.-Israel relations to new heights. In the process, a whole new constituency of support for Israel is being built in precisely the area where we are weakest—among government officials in the State, Defense, and Treasury Departments, in the CIA, in science, trade, agriculture, and other agencies. These are the people responsible for proposing policy and for implementing it. In a crisis these anonymous officials will play a vital role. And they are now learning, through personal experience, the value of Israel to the United States. In other words, we are talking not only about a revolution in the relationship between two states but also in the attitudes of key people responsible for that relationship. That is what we mean when we talk about sinking down roots that will secure the tree of U.S.-Israel relations from future storms.

But we cannot afford to be complacent about these matters. The revolution has only just begun. The gains are not yet secure. We are still dependent on the continued commitment of the Reagan administration to press ahead—at the urging of Congress and the public. But, despite our enormous respect for the administration and its friendship toward Israel, that has not stopped us from opposing and challenging certain arms sales and, of course, so-called peace policies.

The Jordan arms sale of 1985 and 1986 is a case in point.

There was another case last spring. We were advised then by American and Israeli defense experts that a proposed package of F-15s and other highly sophisticated weapons to Saudi Arabia would materially erode Israel's security and add to its burden of defense. Even though there was a risk of tension with the administration, we con-

cluded that the danger to Israel from not challenging that sale was greater than the cost of actively opposing it, and therefore, we mobilized opposition and succeeded in having the package stopped.

Now over the past few weeks, there has been a *third arms sale* case in which we have made an opposite decision. We decided not to fight an arms sale because, in our best judgment, the cost of a confrontation with the administration would have been greater than the marginal benefit of stopping the arms sale. This package to Saudi Arabia involves a variety of missiles about which we are, of course, not particularly happy, and our very strong instinct was to fight it, especially because of Saudi Arabia's abominable record.

But it is also our function to examine and evaluate the facts of the case. And there we found that there was a consensus among defense experts associated with all factions and all schools of thought that this particular package would have questionable impact on the security of Israel. The most authoritative study conducted found that this package would add little of consequence to the existing overall threat to Israel. We also found a remarkable consensus among the major Jewish organizations in our community, such as the Conference of Presidents, Council of Jewish Federations, the defense agencies, NJCRAC,* and CRCs.** They felt that we would not be justified in mounting a major campaign to confront the administration's policy in this particular case.

We are an activist organization, and deciding not to fight does not come easily to us. But I believe we are obliged to act not out of impulse but out of a careful assessment of all the factors in the situa-

tion. Indeed, making decisions in this way is a mark of our maturity and is in fact essential to our continued effectiveness. No army should allow itself to be drawn into battles that are outside its vital interests, and no army should fight when the costs of war are greater than any possible gains from victory.

When we were weak, we did not have the luxury of these problems. Being weak means being unable to fight successfully even when our vital interests are threatened. But when we are strong, we have the dilemma that comes with that situation, the responsibilities of when to unleash and when to restrain our use of power. We have had to learn that a wise, potent policy is not necessarily one based on endless contests of strength.

And we have always had to bear in mind that ultimate criterion that I stated earlier. If the enemies of Israel and America mass at the gate, will the young men and women who must defend the Jewish nation with their lives have at their disposal every means of defense and every advantage that we with all of our ingenuity and all our efforts could arrange? Will America be there as a true ally when Israel needs it?

I am confident that we made the right decision. In looking back, we can find things that we did in implementing the decision that could have been done better.

We are learning as we go. We are all discovering that the revolution in U.S.-Israel relations touches us at AIPAC as well. It affects our attitudes and our actions. And as the issues today are much wider than they were, so the scope of our responsibilities is much greater, and the stakes much higher.

In a word, we are, all of us in this room, giving birth to a new AIPAC, one which has all the character of the original but also one which has the qualities we need to prepare for the future. The times have changed, and we must change with them.

*National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council—Ed.

**Community Relations Committees—Ed.

We know the Congress contains our most reliable and essential friends. But it is essential to work closely with executive branch officials as well. Many of the foreign policy issues of greatest importance to us are decided and managed primarily by the executive branch of government. For example, how the United States conducts itself in the peace process is decided primarily by the president and his advisers. Whether Israel is excluded or asked to be included in scientific arrangements such as Strategic Defense Initiative research and development programs is, on the whole, decided by the executive branch. How the United States will relate to moderate and radical Arab countries, and to Israel itself, is controlled by those who sit on the National Security Council. We must do in the executive branch what we have done in the Congress—make new friends, and spread the message of how close relations with our one reliable, democratic ally in the Middle East serve the interests of the United States of America.

In this context, there are new requirements to our political action. We must expand our lobbying efforts beyond Washington to every congressional district, and this is where you come in.

Accordingly, we have undertaken to establish a system of congressional caucuses throughout America. Pro-Israel citizens, Jews and Christians, are now meeting by [sic] several times a year with their congressmen and senators to sensitize them to the issues we care about. We have established these caucuses in towns you have probably never heard of—McAllen, Texas; Monroe, Louisiana; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Seminole, Oklahoma; Roswell, New Mexico; Bellingham, Washington; Medford, Oregon.

The results of these organizing efforts are amazing. In the Southwest region alone—from Louisiana over to Arizona, congressional voting patterns have changed dra-

matically. A few short years ago, we were fortunate to garner 35 percent of the votes for foreign aid by the 53 congressmen there. By the summer of 1985, 70 percent voted in favor of foreign aid. In 1981, only four of the Southwest's twelve senators voted with us on the AWACS. In 1985 nine of the twelve signed the Heinz-Kennedy Resolution of Disapproval for Jordan arms—and another senator probably would have supported our position if it had come to a vote. A congressman in Texas who had never opened the door to our Washington lobbyists, after meeting with his caucus back home, is today an ardent supporter. An Arkansas congressman, whom our community did not even know early in his campaign and actually feared, began meeting with pro-Israel activists and has become a reliable pro-Israel friend, including visiting Israel to see for himself. The examples go on and on.

We have also begun creating coalitions state by state. In Texas, three state officials have begun one of the most exciting efforts at coalition building I have seen in my career. Tomorrow morning you will hear from commissioners Mack Wallace, Gary Mauro, and Jim Hightower. The agricultural commissioner has begun the Texas Israel Exchange (TIE) which has involved hundreds of farmers in a program of agricultural technology exchange during a period that has witnessed anti-Semitism in the farm belt. Imagine bringing farmers into our caucus system and other efforts at influencing Congress. Imagine the power of a letter from the agricultural commissioner of Texas stating to each member of his congressional delegation that the Free Trade Area legislation was in the best interests of his state. Imagine coalitions in every state from farmers to blacks to oilmen to hispanics. Imagine hundreds of caucuses meeting with their congressmen. That is where we are going. That is where

the strength and future of the U.S.-Israel relationship lies.

This sophisticated political action requires more reliance than ever on individual acts and individual discipline. Individual resilience in the face of an arbitrary universe, indeed in the face of heartbreak, is the test of the human spirit. This is what makes the difference in people. This is what makes the difference for us here at AIPAC.

We know the U.S.-Israel relationship is strong, but that Israel is not yet safe. But we also know that what we do today will

help secure the Jewish state and the Jewish people tomorrow. And now, in this new era in which the United States and Israel are allies in the defense of freedom, we also know that we can pursue our mission, ourselves secure in the knowledge that what is good for America is good for Israel, and that what strengthens Israel equally strengthens America. These are the values which bring us together—love for America and love for Israel. I feel privileged to share in this work with you. Our task is far from over, but with each day we must and we will build on this truly grand beginning.