

The following is the complete transcript of my talk last night about my recent trips to the White House to discuss the American-Israel Relationship. I am grateful to Rabbis Jonathan Miller (Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham, AL), Mark Strauss-Cohen (Temple Emanuel, Winston-Salem, NC), Stuart Weinblatt (B'nai Tzedek, Potomac, MD), Efrem Goldberg (Boca Raton Synagogue, Boca Raton, FL), and Jack Moline (Agudas Achim Congregation, Alexandria, VA) whose additional notes and sermons were of immeasurable help.

My White House Experiences and the American-Israel Relationship

Welcome to tonight's "White House Briefing". I had a chance to be part of some intimate conversations with the Administration on the Middle East in general and the America-Israel relationship in particular. My experiences from late April to mid May are something I will never forget and I can't wait to share it with you tonight.

Let me explain how I would like this evening to go. I will begin with background as to what brought these meetings about and how I, a rabbi in a small Jewish community got to be one of just 15 rabbis invited to the White House. Then I want to share with you the substance of what I heard (I can't hope to give you everything in what amounted to three hours of intense conversation but I hope to give you some of the important ideas and views that were

expressed). That is hard because everything is filtered through a person's ears so what I may skip as unimportant, another person in attendance might have thought was critical but my attempt is to let you feel you were there and tell you what was said with as little editorial comment as possible. Then I want to offer you some very general conclusions. Enjoy the first part which was cool, listen to the second part and decide for yourself about what was said and form some ideas of your own about the American-Israeli relationship today under this Administration and take the third part, my conclusions, with some healthy skepticism. I say that because while I hope you will see that I will not be endorsing the Administration or excoriating it, I will try to sift through the material and offer at least what I think are fair statements about the

Administration and the American-Israel friendship. If I get this evening right, those who have been reasoned critics of the Administration vis-à-vis its policies toward Israel will acknowledge that some good things are being done and that supporters of the Administration will pause and realize that mistakes and missteps have been made and there is still much work that still needs to be done.

After that, I want to hear from you either in the form of questions or comments but I will get to that after my talk. Ok?

Now, this amazing chapter in my life all started with a call from Jack Moline.

BACKGROUND

The day after Passover (April 7), I was contacted by Rabbi Jack Moline, a prominent Conservative rabbi

from Arlington, Va. who serves the Rabbinical Assembly as Director of Public Policy. He told me that his old friend Rahm Emanuel, the White House Chief of Staff, was at his home for seder and they were talking about the loss of Jewish support for the Administration. Rahm Emanuel asked Jack if he could get together a group of rabbis for him to have a conversation about this. Jack told me he was trying to get a good cross section of rabbis from across the country, representing the various denominations and communities. My name was suggested.

Let me pause here, because when I heard that this wasn't a group of hundred of rabbis but a little more than a dozen of us, I was scratching my head at the invitation. I love Charleston but, let's be honest. We are not Clearwater, Boca Raton, Atlanta,

Philadelphia, Chicago, Las Vegas, Birmingham, nor any of the other cities represented, and when I heard who was going and the size of the Jewish communities they represented, I immediately felt that this was a mistake or I was being punked! I did not belong with such a prestigious group and I say that with no false modesty. I have a healthy ego, probably too healthy of one, but I felt I was an odd selection. Honored but confused.

But, I think a reason I was asked was because of the reputation of this Jewish community and congregation despite our size. We are a very active community, from the activities we have on a daily basis to the support we give to various national organizations; we are well known as a very prominent small Jewish community. And we are thought of,

despite our size, as a community concerned and passionate about Israel and the Middle East.

Just last week, we had Dr. Jonathan Adelman, a professor of International Studies discussing Iran and the U.S.-Israel relationship and our social hall was packed. Adelman was very impressed with our community. Despite our size, we accord ourselves well and it is noticed and I think as a result, I got noticed.

Jack told me that if I accept, and he needs to know as soon as possible so he can put this all together, I would not be representing any organization or group. I would be speaking for myself and from my own experiences. I know what my community is saying about the Administration and I should come and speak about the concerns I have and what I am

hearing. That was the point of this meeting with Rahm Emanuel.

I was also told to keep this between us (obviously letting only those in my community who need to know my whereabouts). Jack said to me that this all will be made public after our meeting but he was trying to create something different than other official groups and individuals that would be there for other soirées. This was not going to be a “charm offensive” or a photo-op. Of course, everything in Washington is political and everyone has an agenda but we were there to work, to report honestly on what we felt and are hearing and report back what we heard.

Parenthetically, that would prove to be true. Not that I am complaining but we weren't ever offered water or complimentary White House mints. And the

only photos I have of these meetings were those taken on my i-Phone! This was a private session to put our cards on the table, express our concerns and give the Administration a chance to react and offer a different narrative. We wouldn't have to be careful what we said or asked and there would be no expectations about what came out of this session. It would be just a conversation where we as rabbis, representing if you will a focus group of American Jews who could talk in Jack's words "truth to power" and they could have a chance to talk to us. Afterwards, Jack said he fully expected us to then share our experience with our communities with no strings attached.

Shocked, I shared all this with our President Eric Persily and our Executive Director Steve Max, both of

whom said: No way! That is amazing! You so gotta go! And as a result, I started to prepare for my trip which was scheduled to take place on April 20th.

Along with reading more material about the Middle East and becoming more acutely aware of what the Administration was and was not doing, I began to think of what I would want to express to the White House. And I began to formulate two tracks: what I was thinking and what my congregation was saying to me. Just for complete disclosure, though I do not bring up my politics at services from this pulpit, I am on the left of center when it comes to Middle East foreign policy and while I can't always leave that at the door, I try to see things for all angles and can restate them in a diplomatic fashion. So I tried to think

of how to accurately express what I was hearing from the pro-Israel community locally.

And the common thread I was hearing through our daily minyan breakfast table, at kiddushes, at our weekly lunches and the day to day conversations and e-mails was that the President and this Administration seem to be sending a much more conciliatory set of messages toward the Muslim/Arab world than he is toward our friend and ally Israel. The President's relationship with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been rather strained at times and, since the recent dispute over the permit approval of 1600 apartments in Jerusalem, even hostile. This was of great concern to many in my congregation. In just 15 months under this Administration, the strong friendship between these two countries appeared to

be changing in very short order. As a result, when I would have a chance to speak, my first question was going to be along the lines of:

“I understand that the Obama Administration is attempting to engage the Arab and Muslim world. I understand that dialogue is necessary and engagement is critical but what I am hearing and feeling is that these recent public ‘spats’ between the two countries is creating a narrative that this Administration is distancing itself from Israel. The unshakable friendship between these two countries appears to no longer be on solid footing and that is not helpful.”

Parenthetically, I would later learn that was the thinking of other members of this group and what they felt the Administration had to hear, namely : why

does it feel that the relationship between these two allies is not what it used to be?

In addition, there was a great deal of concern about the harsh stance the Administration has taken toward the Israeli government regarding the building permits for apartments in a Jewish neighborhood in Jerusalem. As someone left of center, I understood the Administration's concerns and could almost echo them but at the same time, the reaction did seem out of proportion. These apartments were not settlements on the West Bank but apartments in a Jewish area of Jerusalem, home to nearly half of the city's Jewish population. The Prime Minister of Israel apologized several times for the unfortunate timing of the announcement (it happened during the Vice President's visit to Israel to announce the resumption

of indirect talks between the two sides). This strong condemnation and stripping down of Prime Minister Netanyahu when he was in the U.S. caused a great deal of pain and outrage even among Jews who believed Israel misstepped here.

One of the rabbis in our group would in our meeting very succinctly put her finger on the pulse of what we were all hearing among the pro-Israel community. She provided an e-mail that was circling around her congregation which formed the basis for the first question we would pose to the Administration: “Surely something must be terribly wrong with an Administration that seems to be far more concerned with a Jew building a house in Israel than with a Muslim building a nuclear bomb in Iran”.

Right or wrong, that seemed to capture the sentiments that we all were hearing.

And with these concerns, that is how we all came to Washington. The 15 of us, Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, McCain, Obama, and Clinton supporters, men and women, from large communities and small, all trying to explaining what we were hearing and what we were feeling in our communities. And as people who had no other agenda, we could talk respectfully, but bluntly. It is not like we were an organization and it wasn't like we were ever going to be invited back. We were just an ad hoc group and this was our one shot at speaking "truth to power."

So, we all met for the first time on April 20th , in a magnificent private office with a spectacular view of Washington, D.C.

Jack Moline knows people!

Jack gave us a chance to introduce each other and then kind of explained to us what we could expect. He told us that we should, if we haven't already done so, jot down a couple of questions or concerns that best reflect our take on the situation.

He then role played for us, him acting as Rahm Emanuel so we could practice on what we might want to say and what kind of reaction we might get from Emanuel. As I would discover, Jack did a pretty good job of acting as Emanuel. In fact, I was sitting next to Jack and near Emanuel at the meeting and at one point I turned to Jack and said "Hey, that guy plays a good Jack Moline."

What I appreciated about Jack Moline is that though he was/is a supporter of Barack Obama, his

instructions to us were very telling and spoke volumes to me about the man. He said on the one hand, this is a really cool thing that we are about to do. On the other hand, he warned us that we 15 have an opportunity to be a positive force in the relationship between Israel and the United States, the Jewish community and the President of the United States. “Don’t let this privilege blind you to the responsibility you have been given. We are not here to help the Administration or to attack it. We are here to help the American-Israel Relationship.”

That stuck with me. I was there to strengthen the relationship between American and Israel.

We left that private office at 2:30 for our 3:00 o’clock appointment. Passing through security was incredibly easy (again, Jack is good), and once we

received our visitor badges, we were on our way past the press staging area, the front lawn and walked right into the West Wing.

WHAT WAS SAID

We were greeted right away by Susan Sher, who is Michelle Obama's Chief of State but more importantly for this group, the Liaison to the Jewish Community a position she shares with Danielle Borrin, who is a special assistant to Joe Biden and who also joined us. Parenthetically, the Jewish Liaison is a role that has existed since at least the Carter administration. Sher escorted us into the Roosevelt Room, the room right next to Oval office, and we each found a seat around this long table.

After a few minutes of talking with Sher, Ambassador Dennis Ross, not Rahm Emanuel,

entered the room shaking each of our hands before he began to talk to us. Side note: We were told the week we were coming that he was going to join Emanuel for this meeting. In all honesty when I heard that, while we were there to speak to Emanuel, *I* was there to listen to Dennis Ross. Ross is probably one of the most distinguished diplomats in this country. He has worked in the Carter administration, the Reagan administration, under President George H.W. Bush, and President Bill Clinton. He has been a Middle East envoy, the chief peace negotiator for this country, he helped the Israelis and Palestinians reach the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, facilitated the Israel-Jordan Treaty of Peace. He is now Special Assistant to the President and Senior Advisor for the Persian Gulf and

Southwest Asia, which of course includes the entire Middle East. I am currently reading his book “Myths, Illusions, and Peace.” This man has been involved in the Middle East and the search for peace for decades and to shake his hand, knowing who he has met and what he devoted his life to was an honor. The Roosevelt Room didn’t wow me, meeting Emanuel didn’t either. Being in the same room as Ambassador Ross did.

Ross opened by briefing us about Iran, the issue he is most involved in and the issue that takes up, he said, most of this Administration’s time. It is their #1 priority, he said. He explained that stopping Iran from become a nuclear capable nation is the most pressing issue of the day. And this Administration is working diplomatically to isolate Iran by garnering international

support for “meaningful” sanctions that will force Iran to abandon her nuclear ambitions.

Ross also told us by way of introduction that solving the Israeli/Palestinian issue is important because it takes a key piece off the board that the Iranians use to distract the Arab world from the real danger in the Middle East and the world – a nuclear empowered Iran.

Then, Rahm Emanuel came in, every bit the person he is portrayed to be: confident, tough, self-assured, and very much a take charge kind of guy. He told us he brought us all here to assure himself good seats for the High Holidays. I thought to myself that if they ever did a movie on the Obama Administration, Robert Downey, Jr. should **so** play him!

After some courtesies, Emanuel got right down to business. He told us he wanted to have a frank discussion on the issues and what is concerning American Jewry. He launched into a well prepared and quite thorough discussion on what is going on currently with the Administration and the Middle East.

Let me share that with you.

Emanuel spoke to us in the name of the President and he said the President fully understands Israeli concerns. The Israelis entered bilateral discussions in late 90's and that led to the intifada. They undertook on their own unilateral action to leave Gaza and Southern Lebanon and that led to rocket attacks and missiles fired from Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. We understand Israeli

concerns and we are trying to find another way, he said.

With that in mind; he told us how this Administration is approaching the Middle East.

1. American knows Israel cannot make people without a true sense of security.
2. America knows that the Israel/American relationship is critical and that is why, despite what is being reflected in the press, President Obama has spent more private time with Prime Minister Netanyahu than any other foreign leader.
3. Emanuel emphasized how this country continues to firmly stand behind her friend Israel. Examples: a) by not participating in the Durbin Conference (the conference on racism

that like 2002 singled out Israel as a racist country) and b) categorically rejecting the U.N. Goldstone report that accused Israel of war crimes in Gaza. There is no space between Israel and this country.

4. This Administration has a close working relationship with the Israeli military and intelligence community – Defense Minister Ehud Barak has been to Washington five times.
5. Emanuel emphasized that the Administration has condemned both sides, not just Israel, for actions that create difficulties and give the other side an excuse to walk away from the proximity talks that we are trying to establish.

6. And finally, with regard to Iran: re-emphasizing Ambassador Dennis Ross' opening comments, Iran is this Administration's number one concern. This Administration's goal is working feverishly to isolate and weaken Iran.

Unilateral U.S. sanctions are never going to be as strong as world sanctions and that is why Secretary of State Clinton and President Obama are tirelessly working that angle.

Dennis Ross and Rahm Emanuel then gave us a chance to react. I will say, editorially speaking, neither as criticism or admiration but as observation, Emanuel's approach was masterful because he instantly changed the way this meeting was going to proceed. He wanted to set the pieces up to his advantage. "Here is what we are doing. Tell us what

are we doing wrong? What are you hearing?” It puts you on the defensive and was the move of a very smart politician. He was not going to place himself in a defensive position.

And so this is how the meeting continued. One of us started by saying that the perception among Jews is that Israel is being singled out, unfairly criticized. Israel is slammed for a permit for construction of apartments in Jewish Jerusalem but not a word is being said to the Palestinians who name a street in Ramallah after a notorious terrorist . Why is only Israel condemned for acts that hurt the peace process?

We were told that the blame should be at Media not the Administration. The Palestinians were condemned and forcefully but it was not picked up by

the press. And they said that is typical of the way the media works: “Dog bites man” – no story, “Man bites dogs” - a story. When we are critical of the Palestinian side, it is not news, but when we are critical of an Israeli action, that is news.

They admitted that they were critical of the Israeli government for the apartment approval, but they reiterated that it is because the Administration is trying to get both sides to avoid the “side shows”, actions that allow the other party to walk out.

Dennis Ross added a point that, I admit some will disagree with tonight, but I think explains the Administration’s approach. He said: the gaps between the two parties are far less than either side thinks, but the psychology is worse than it’s ever been. And that is what they are working on – the

psychology. If we can change the psychology of fear and mistrust, we can get the two sides to an agreement. And both sides need to avoid actions that reinforce that mistrust. Approving of apartments in Jerusalem by the Israeli government on the **very day** proximity talks begin and naming a street after a **terrorist** the week proximity talks begin are not helpful when we are trying to bring the two sides together. We have to change the psychology.

Another concern we raised with the Administration was regarding linkage – a view of the Middle East that the Arab-Israeli problem is the root cause of all our problems in the region. Solve the Palestinian-Israeli issue and everything falls into place. We raised this because it has been widely reported that both President Obama and General

David Petraeus have said that the Israeli-Palestinian issue puts the lives of our American troops directly at risk. It is as if Israel and that unresolved conflict with the Palestinians costs us blood and treasure. The two are linked.

They flat out denied that. They said that was not what was being said. They argued to us that what was being said was not that our involvement with Israel causes us problems but rather **failure** to solve that situation allows radical elements to use that conflict as a convenient way to recruit others. Going back to what Ross said earlier, there is no linkage but a desire to remove a chess piece, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, off the table, a piece the other side constantly plays to avoid and distract from the real issues.

When it was my turn to talk, I said (as I mentioned earlier) that I understand that the Administration is trying to engage the Muslim world, like the Cairo Speech delivered by the President in 2009. But what I am hearing from my part of the world is that while the Administration is learning to speak Arabic (not a bad thing), they are forgetting their Hebrew. They are not speaking Hebrew and the perception is that they are ignoring the Israeli population and the sensitivities of the pro-Israel community. Others added to that thought by reminding our hosts of the way Prime Minister Netanyahu was treated in March by the President. We seem to be seeing a White House more interested in a relationship with the Muslim world than with Israel.

To my question and to others who raised similar concerns, the Administration emphasized that they are not involved in a relationship with the Muslim world at the expense of their relationship with Israel. That relationship remains unshakeable and the U.S.-Israel bond is unbreakable.

They realize that there is a perception problem and hence, the purpose of this outreach. However, the relationship has not changed. The Netanyahu/Obama meeting in March was not as presented. Netanyahu met with Obama for two hours. It was a private meeting so no photos (which is protocol). The talks were substantive and conducted as allies. After their conversations, Obama went upstairs and Netanyahu stayed to work with his staff based on what they heard. The Israelis called Obama

back at midnight with some new ideas and he came down and spent 30 more minutes (this despite the exhaustion of the day- it was the day of the National Health Care Bill signing). Obama has spent more time with Natanyahu than any other foreign leader. This story of a “snub” is simply not accurate. Yet in the absence of news and reaction from the Administration, the vacuum was filled with a different narrative. They told us that they would have to do a better job of telling the story of our country’s relationship with Israel.

There were other issues raised at that first meeting but I say “first” because, unexpectedly, Emanuel said: let’s meet again in a month and you tell us if we are not getting the narrative right. We’ll invite

you back in a month and you tell us if we are getting the messaging right.

Understand, this was a complete surprise. I was sitting near Jack and I saw his face; this was completely unexpected. But the offer was sincere. And since this was now going to part of an ongoing dialogue at least for the next month, we were asked to keep things low key and off the record. If we did speak about the meeting, they asked that we do so in very general terms, focusing more on what we are observing on the ground and be ready to talk more in the follow-up.

So for the next couple of weeks, we did just that with more reading about what is happening which now included receiving material from the Administration, information they hoped showed the

strength of the relationship between the Administration and Israel. Of particular note for me was an address given by National Security Advisor James Jones for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (a pro-Israel think tank) that I have available and you should read.

We all (the rabbis) kept in touch and we all observed, talked among ourselves and waited for the announcement of that second meeting. However, with the B.P. oil disaster and a host of other things going on, we hadn't heard and we were starting to think there wasn't going to be a second meeting. We even asked Jack if that was his feeling, could we begin talking about our meeting. But then on May 6th, we got a call for the follow up meeting scheduled for May 13th.

Again, we all met for a pre-briefing and then again we met with the same players, Ross and Sher and Emanuel and Borrin, except added to the mix this time was Dan Shapiro, a member of the National Security Council and its top Middle East expert. And once again, our meeting opened with Ambassador Dennis Ross. He said to us that he hopes we have seen the manifestations of the change. He made it a point to emphasize that regarding defense, intelligence and security, the relationship between Israel and America have never been stronger. He quoted Israel's defense minister Ehud Barak who, after his sixth visit to Washington, declared that the relationship between the two allies is as strong as with any other Administration. Ross emphasized that regarding Israel's defense, the U.S. meets weekly

with her ally Israel and we should have received information expressing that.

Dan Shapiro introduced himself and talked about the intelligence cooperation between the two countries. He then dropped a bombshell. The Administration was announcing that day a \$205 million appropriation for an Iron Dome missile defense system on top of the \$3 billion in aid Israel already gets. This joint defense project (Israel will pay half) will deter incoming missiles and is part of the Administration's understanding that no negotiations and solutions can work without an effective missile defense system for the Jewish State. This country, he said, is committed to a secure Israel.

Rahm Emanuel added that in his view, there has never been more cooperation between Israel and

America when it comes to her security. He also emphasized that it was this Administration that successfully completed what the Bush Administration campaigned hard for, namely Israel's acceptance into the OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development), an elite group of 31 nations committed to democracy and the market economy, providing a setting to compare policy experiences, seeking answers to common problems, identifying good practices, and co-ordinating domestic and international policies of its members. Admission has been a dream of Israel's and her long fought battle for acceptance in the world.

Like last time, after hearing them speak, we had our turn and tried to respectfully acknowledge the good that the Administration was doing but

emphasizing where we or our communities felt they were not going in a helpful direction.

We asked about news we were hearing that the Administration is pushing for a U.N. nuclear free Middle-East summit, something that will single out and put pressure on Israel to give up its often denied but always assumed nuclear program. They responded by saying that since 1995, this has been something that has been pushed by this country and accepted by Israel. They promised us that such a program (scheduled for 2012) will not be a summit that singles out Israel or hurts her deterrence capability in any way. To quote one of the members there: “We understand Israel’s full layer of deterrence”.

We raised questions regarding the proximity talks. In theory, the proximity talks can be helpful because they avoid direct conflicts early between the two parties and keep things moving until we get to where we ultimately need to be: face to face direct talks. But proximity talks put enormous pressure on America. We are in the middle of any disputes that arise. We asked what will happen when there are difficulties and the U.S. will have to be the arbiter. We don't want a replay of the tension in March which created the problem that brought us here.

We also raised the question of sanctions on Iran and how long are we doing to go down that path before we say, sanctions are simply a dead end; we don't seem to be getting to where sanctions have any "teeth" because the international community simply is

not united behind us. How long do we wait and what is the next step?

On that issue, Emanuel said that we cannot isolate Iran by **ourselves** in a meaningful way to affect the Iranian economy and force a change. That is why we need time to get the international community to work with us. If we move too quickly and pass our own sanctions through Congress, this will let the rest of the countries off the hook. We are working on this the proper way he said, getting the international community on board. We cannot operate on a timeline.

I, and others, raised the issue that the President himself needs to be more fully engaged and show both Israelis and members of the pro-Israel community that **he** gets it, that we need to see a

President that shows, like previous Presidents, that Israel is a friend. This outreach to us is good, but things won't change until the **President** does the outreach and we are not seeing that vis-à-vis Israel. He needs to talk directly to the Israelis. To use a baseball analogy, from successfully getting Israel invited to join the OECD to the Iron Dome missile defense system to speeches coming from the Administration officials, the White House is starting to put runners on the bases in their attempt to change the negative messaging that is clearly out there. But the team's RBI leader is in the dugout. The President is the only one who could drive them in and he needs to visit Jerusalem and do what he did in Cairo in '09, namely reach out to **Israelis** who have serious concerns about him and show he understands their

fears. Until then, the runners will be left on base stranded.

The answer I and others got was the President will find his opportunities to make his feelings known in time. And that was it.

There was more but as if to emphasize the point that we should not worry about where the President stands on Israel, Emmanuel, Dennis Ross and Dan Shapiro, as Jews and supporters of Israel, emphasized to us that they would not be in this Administration if they felt, for one minute, Obama's priorities were not in the right place.

Before Emanuel left, he reiterated to us that there are three things that are key to U.S. foreign policy: 1: Isolate Iran from the international community which will force them to end their nuclear

program; 2: Remove America's footprint in Iraq; and 3: the need to work on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

As I said there was a lot more but these were, in my view, the major issues discussed. The conversations were always civil and courteous but there were tense moments as the questions were not always answered or answered to the satisfaction of everyone and there were therefore, follow ups. I haven't added those simply because those who felt the answers satisfied didn't need it and those who had issues with an answer I don't think got much more beyond what we heard initially.

CONCLUSIONS

I walked away with four conclusions I want to just touch upon which I will end with before I open it up to you. Remember, these are only my conclusions:

Number 1: The America-Israel relationship is a complex one. By that, I mean that we are allies and close friends but we will see things differently from time to time. And I don't know if the Administration is seeing the Middle East the same way as most Israelis are now. Doesn't mean we are not allies but we have different perspectives and, therefore, the two countries will approach a particular issue differently.

In addition, since we both are democratic countries with governments that swing center-left or center-right depending on elections, the relationship will become complicated or feel different depending on who is in office. Would relations feel closer if

center-left Tzipi Livni of the Kadima Party or Ehud Barack of the Labor Party were in power in Israel? Possibly. Would a McCain/ Netanyahu relationship work better? Probably. To put it another way, tensions can develop when one government is more conservative or more liberal than the other and I think we might be experiencing that here. That doesn't mean there are not major agreements between our countries because when it comes to the core issues, security, Iran and the peace process, there are common principles. However, the focus and urgency are probably going to be different and that's when tensions arise and will continue to arise.

Two: This Administration is a pro-Israel Administration. They love Israel and are committed to her safety and security. As one of the rabbis said

who did not walk away particularly happy with the Obama Administration even after the second meeting: They may have different ideas on how to apply the love or achieve that safety but it is a mistake to dismiss them as anti-Israel. He said to “To put it differently, they believe very similar things to Tzipi Livni and Shimon Peres in Israel. You can disagree vehemently and passionately with their approach but you wouldn’t challenge Livni’s nor Peres’ love of Israel. And you shouldn’t do that here.” I think that cannot be overstated.

Three: If you are an Obama supporter and you are part of the pro-Israel community you really need to have a gut check, be honest and ask yourself: Does the Administration have a grasp of the difficult issues ahead? Do they really have a full and broad

range of foreign policy ideas and plans that show they understand the complexity and the dangers that are looming? Do they have a Plan B if and when sanctions on Iran don't work? It is becoming apparent that we are running out of time and sanctions are not being implemented, let alone working.

And how will these proximity talks ever lead to direct talks when either side can easily find provocation? How will the U.S. handle being arbiter in the next dispute? And what has changed to make the Administration feel that this path of engagement will lead to anything but tension? As they even told us: the first direct talks back in the 90's led to the intifada and suicide bombers, the unilateral disengagement from Gaza and Lebanon led to Hamas and Hezbollah. What has changed? There

are serious questions that should be asked about whether the Administration grasps the difficulties and has the answers for what lie ahead.

And Fourth: If you are a critic of the Administration, one cannot conveniently ignore or pretend that the defensive tools and security cooperation that we heard and now you have heard about is phony. You might say they are not enough and that the Administration's attempts to "engage" no matter what is disastrous and misguided foreign policy, but to hear statements that this White House hates Israel or is anti-Semitic, is not only false but undermines credibility.

I end by saying I was honored and privilege to be asked to be part of this event and to be with the extraordinary men and women I was asked to join. I

didn't go on April 20th to unmask the Administration as frauds or to work for their re-election. I hope you listened and feel I took my role seriously, namely: to listen, to share with them my feelings and the feelings I am hearing from my community and then be honest and share with you what I think the Administration is getting right and what it still need to work on. And I was honored to represent Charleston, West Virginia and to play a part in the American-Israeli Friendship.

Thank you very much.